

Altered Minds Inc.
Partnership for Better Housing
Newcomer Housing Needs Assessment

Bashir Ahmad

July 2023



The photo shows the 25-unit Centre Village complex in May 2023. Built over a decade ago by Manitoba Housing, it serves as a sober reminder of the housing challenges faced by low-income residents and newcomers in Manitoba.



**Public Health
Agency of Canada**

**Agence de la santé
publique du Canada**

Acknowledgement

This project was made possible through the contributions of those who took the time and effort to participate, share lived experiences, and discuss ideas and suggestions for the betterment of the newcomer housing experience in Winnipeg.

We would like to say thank you to those who attended our community meeting: Azaria Butariho and Codi Guenther from New Journey Housing, Cheryl Krostewitz from Manitoba Non Profit Housing Association, Karen Sharma Executive Director at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, Deepti Kochhar and Hiwot Amare from Mount Carmel Clinic, Cst. Harminder Singh and Cst. Ryan Haney from the Winnipeg Police Service, Sarah Cayas from Opportunities for Employment, Hani Ataan Al-Ubeady from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and David Wiebe from Home By Now. Your valuable insights and thoughtful discussions impacted the direction of this work. Beverly Pageau kindly helped with organizing the community meeting and took detailed notes as a volunteer. Ashley Spence from Altered Minds sent invitations for the community meeting to about eighty organizations in Winnipeg.

Valerie Cavers, Executive Director at Mosaic, provided detailed insights into conditions at the Central Park neighborhood. Adrienne Schellenberg, Newcomer Case Coordinator at Family Dynamics, provided insights into high needs newcomer families and their increased challenges. Boris Ntambwe, Resettlement Program and Transitional Housing Manager at Accueil Francophone, directed us to resources.

Milagros Dacwag from Altered Minds provided valuable insights about the pre-arrival services program and helped link us to members of the Filipino community. Leila Castro kindly provided feedback on her work administering the 204 Filipino Forum. Yulia Savchuk from Altered Minds provided detailed and valuable feedback at the community meeting and highlighted the challenges single mothers face when they arrive in Winnipeg. Carly Duboff and Ryan Koreen from Manitoba Housing shared expert insights into some of the obstacles facing the creation of a coordinated application system for social and affordable housing. Dr. Shayna Plaut from the Centre for Social Science Research and Policy directed us to useful resources. Alexandra Caporale from the Manitoba Eco Network provided insights into the health effects of industry on neighborhoods in Winnipeg. Christina Maes Nino, Executive Director at the Manitoba Non Profit Housing Association directed us to useful resources. Martin Blumrich from Altered Minds kindly connected us to the Central Park Stewardship Committee.

Thank you to Parmdeep Kaur, Miriam Bazan and Thania Bazan for providing administrative support, Ahmad Al Sheikh Omar for IT support and Jacqueline Salamisan for processing financial invoices, all from Altered Minds Inc.

Grace Eidse, Executive Director at Altered Minds Inc, has been very supportive throughout the project and has connected us to organizations and people who then provided feedback. Codi Guenther, Executive Director at New Journey Housing, provided key insights into potential solutions for some of the identified challenges including by pointing out the need for a coordinated application system for social and affordable housing. Emily Halldorson from MANSO made extended literature reviews from her past research into housing accessible to us. Emily's detailed feedback on the first draft helped improve this report.

This work would not have been a success without continuous support and detailed insights from Albina Bushueva. As the Project Coordinator for the Partnership for Better Housing at Altered Minds Inc, Albina has been fully engaged throughout the project and provided key valuable direction to the work.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to the newcomers who agreed to interview for this study individually, and those who took part in our focus group discussions. They are the ones this research is about, and it is our sincere hope that our work leads to positive changes in how future newcomers experience their first few years in Winnipeg.

This project is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

*You need a place to stay, regardless of when you arrived
and whether you can afford it. You need a place first.
Then other things.*

Quote from a refugee parent recently landing in Winnipeg

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	7
Introduction	7
Altered Minds Inc.....	10
The city of Winnipeg	10
Definitions.....	12
Purpose of Needs Assessment.....	13
Scope of Needs Assessment	13
Methodology and Data Sources.....	14
Data analysis – Rents, availability, and affordable housing.....	16
Case Study: a recently arrived Ukrainian family’s housing experience	20
Neighborhood profile: Central Park as a neighborhood where many newcomers live	21
Key Issues Identified	23
Recommendations	35
Conclusion.....	39
References	40

Executive Summary

This report provides an assessment of the challenges newcomers to the city of Winnipeg face when trying to rent a place. The challenges fall under the four categories of Affordability (cost and availability) Conditions (safety, cleanliness) Consistency (residential stability) and Context (neighborhood opportunity).

The report outlines challenges identified and provides best practices from lived experience as well as solutions suggested by newcomers and by settlement professionals serving newcomers to the city of Winnipeg.

A Community Action Plan will be created based on this Needs Assessment. This research is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Introduction

With an area of 647,797 square kilometers, Manitoba is larger than every European country (Manitoba, 2023). Its population however is 1,431,792 as of January 2023 (Quarterly Demographic Estimates, 2023), meaning that the province has a vast potential for population growth. The major factor driving Manitoba's population growth is NOT natural growth (the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths) as can be seen in Figure 1 below. *International immigration* into the province is the main driver of population growth and of the housing demand in the province and particularly in the city of Winnipeg. International Immigration has two sub-categories. One is *Net International Immigration*. These are people who come to the province as Permanent Residents. The other class of people who come to the province but are not covered by the term Net International Immigration are those who are not permanent residents but have been allowed to temporarily relocate to Manitoba from abroad. This includes international students, temporary foreign workers, and visitors including people coming to Canada from Ukraine under the Canada – Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel program. They fall under *Other International Immigration*. Many non-permanent residents eventually apply, and are accepted, for permanent residence.

According to the 2021 census 257,620 people or 19.7% of the population in Manitoba were immigrants (born outside Canada) and 34,285 or 2.6% of the population were non-permanent residents such as international students. Of the immigrant population 58,370 were recent immigrants, meaning those who have settled in the province within the past five years. That is 22.7% of the total immigrant population (2021 Census of Population - Manitoba, 2021). In proportion to population, this is one of the highest immigration rates among Canadian provinces.

Figure 1 below shows the growth in Manitoba population due to births, international immigration, and other international immigration over the past 20 years. The top figure shows Net International Immigration and Other International Immigration separately, while in the bottom figure both are combined into All International Immigration. As can be seen from the figures, the number of immigrants from both categories far outweighs the growth in population due to births within the province. This data was retrieved from Statista, and is originally from Statistics Canada (Number of recent immigrants in Manitoba, 2023).

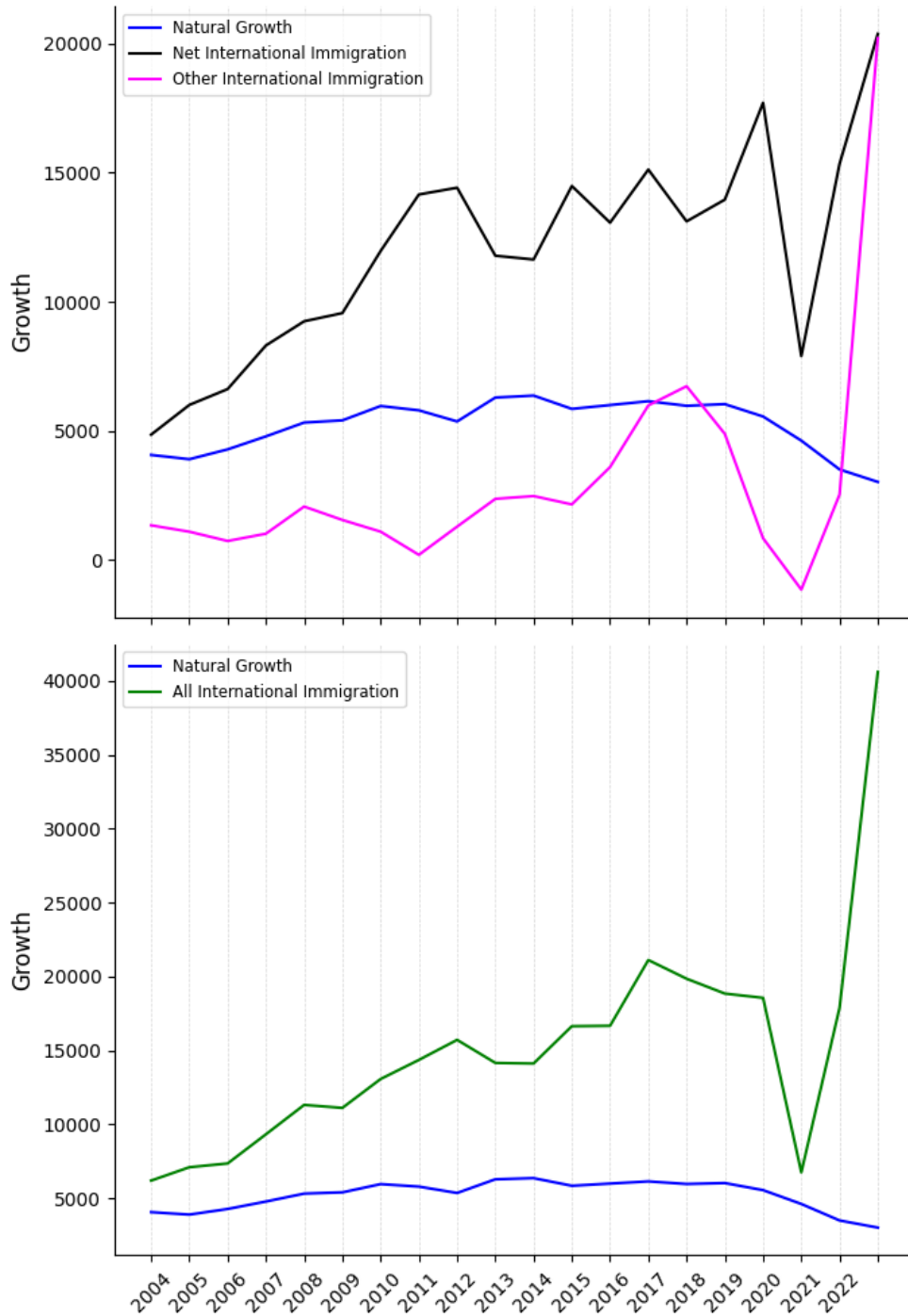


Figure 1. Population growth factors in Manitoba

It can be seen that **Natural Growth** fluctuates over the years, reaching a peak in 2009, and then generally *declining*, reaching its lowest point in 2022 at 3028.

Net International Immigration shows an overall increasing trend, with some fluctuations. The highest value is in 2022 at 20380, reflecting a significant contribution to population growth due to an influx of new permanent residents from Ukraine and Afghanistan.

Other International Immigration varies widely but has a sharp increase in 2022, reaching 20,213. This increase is due to an influx of newcomers from Ukraine who arrived as non-permanent residents. Almost every such person interviewed for this study said they'd apply for the Permanent Resident status as soon as they qualify.

Total Population Growth has been consistently growing from 2003 to 2022. The growth due to international factors has become more significant over time, especially in recent years, overshadowing the natural growth.

Between January 2022 and end of December 2022, the natural increase in population through births was 3,028 people, while during the same period the increase in population due to immigration was 40,593 people (Quarterly Demographic Estimates, 2023). As mentioned above, this figure includes non permanent residents such as international students as well as Ukrainians who came to Manitoba under the Canada – Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel program. Our study considers the housing needs of all newcomers to Winnipeg, regardless of whether they are permanent or temporary residents.

Figure 2 below sheds more light on net immigration into Manitoba in 2022. This image was taken from Quarterly Demographic Estimates, January 2023, by Manitoba Bureau of Statistics (Quarterly Demographic Estimates, 2023) with permission.

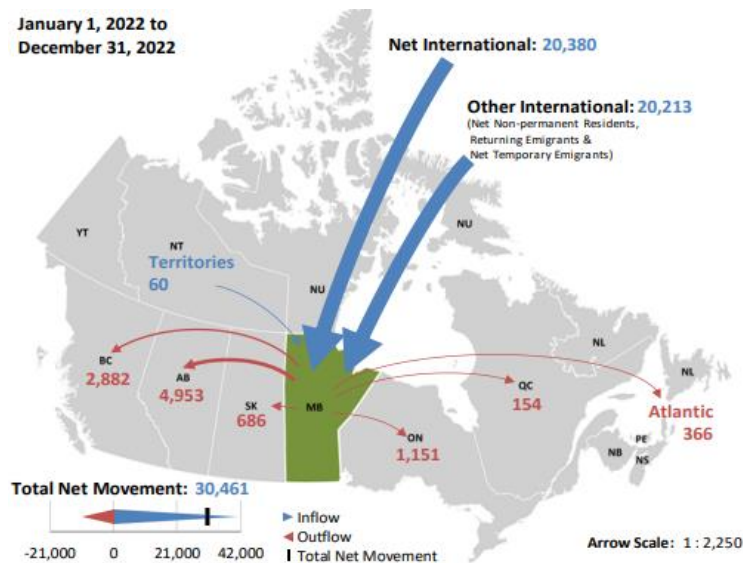


Figure 2. Manitoba population growth in 2022

As the first phase of its *Partnership for Better Housing*, Altered Minds Inc carried out a Needs Assessment of newcomer housing issues in Winnipeg. The Needs Assessment identified the most pressing issues that newcomers face in regards to finding a place to live in Winnipeg. It also highlighted best practices, ideas, and suggestions for potential solutions. A Community Action Plan is to be developed based on these findings.

Housing is an essential human need. Winnipeg residents in general are no strangers to difficulties when it comes to finding a proper place to rent or buy. These issues tend to be amplified for newcomers. This Needs Assessment aims to bring into sharp focus the housing issues newcomers experience. The focus is almost entirely on problems renting a place, rather than buying, as the overwhelming majority of newcomers interviewed for this study mentioned that they do not have the means to buy.

Altered Minds Inc.

Altered Minds Inc (<https://alteredminds.ca/>) is a charitable organization that provides responsive programs and services that assist individuals in acquiring skills to overcome barriers, build community and create positive change in the world. It was founded in 2004. One of the founders, Grace Eidse, is the Executive Director. The organization is called “Altered Minds” because when we meet people from around the world and listen to their stories “we become more open minded, more caring and more respectful.”

From 2004 to 2020 AMI ran *the Entry Program*, the information orientation program for all newcomers to Winnipeg. This program was highly regarded across Winnipeg and Manitoba as it allowed newcomers to attend a series of information sessions on key topics within the first few weeks of their landing in Winnipeg. The topics included housing, health, police, education, and City services among others.

AMI continues to work for the benefit of the newcomer community, offering computer classes at various levels, with language support if needed. Participants are provided with free computers. Other programs include a youth drop-in centre as well as the settlement online pre-arrival orientation program for newcomers destined to land in Manitoba. AMI’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/amimanitoba?mibextid=ZbWKwL>) is quite popular.

The city of Winnipeg

Just over 52% of Manitobans live in the Winnipeg area which had a population of 749,607 in 2021, according to Statistics Canada (Winnipeg Census Profile, 2021).

The 2021 census also showed that 201,040 people or 27.3% of the population in Winnipeg were immigrants (born outside Canada) and 30,090 or 4.1% of the population were non-permanent residents such as international students. Of the immigrant population 45,900 were recent immigrants, meaning those who had settled in the city within the past five years. That is 22.8% of the total immigrant population (Winnipeg Census Profile, 2021). Winnipeg alone attracts about 75% percent of all newcomers to the province (Manitoba Immigration Facts Report, 2020).

According to a City of Winnipeg housing needs assessment (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirtliffe, & Sinclair, 2020), immigrants are the fastest growing segment of the city’s population. “The growth of immigrant households has been significant. Recently arriving immigrants (last five years) numbered 52,000 people in 2016 or 7.5% of the total city population. They are concentrated in Fort Garry, Centennial, West Kildonan and Lord Selkirk zones. **Recent immigrant households tend to be larger, younger and require larger rental units that are often not available in the numbers and at the affordable prices low income recent immigrant households require**” (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirtliffe, & Sinclair, 2020). According to the same source, buildings in downtown Winnipeg are amongst the oldest. This is significant because newcomers tend to settle within the inner city as they first arrive. They usually do not own a vehicle and thus need to be closer to bus routes and other amenities. As a result, they usually live in older buildings in which on average the quality of housing units might be not as high as for example

in suburban areas. Based on an online search by the author in July 2023, average rent for a one-bedroom unit in downtown Winnipeg was \$1157 which is somewhat below city average, but still at levels that are not considered affordable for newly arrived families and individuals. Figure 3 below compares average rents between core and suburban areas in Winnipeg for October 2022. Data was taken from *Average Rents for Areas with a Population of 10,000 and Over by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2023)*.

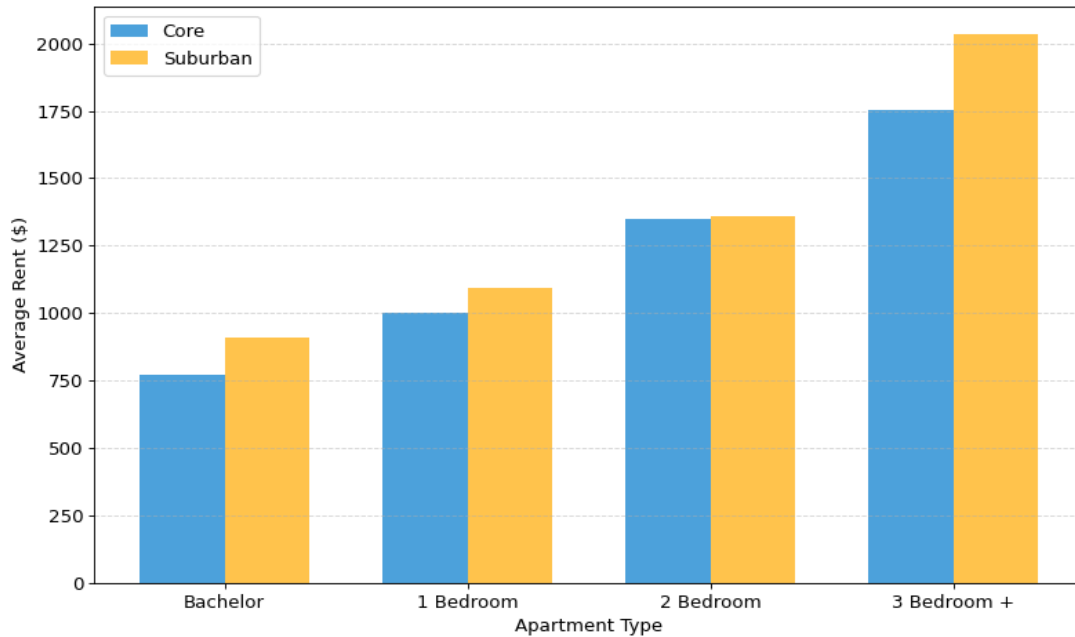


Figure 3. Average rents in Winnipeg core and suburban zones (2022)

From the figure it can be seen that **suburban areas are generally more expensive**. Across all apartment types, the average rent is higher in the suburban zones compared to the core.

The **largest difference in average rent** between core and Suburban areas is observed in 3 bedroom + apartments. These are usually the units needed by newcomer families, who tend to be larger.

There is **more consistent pricing for smaller apartments**. The difference in rent between core and suburban areas for bachelor and one-bedroom apartments is relatively smaller compared to larger apartments.

Newcomer families often have to make “impossible trade-offs” upon arrival: because rents and everyday costs of living are high, they often have to focus on survival jobs rather than long term resettlement objectives (Silvius, Halldorson, & Ataan Al-Ubeady, 2021).

In terms of supply, the construction of new one- and two-bedroom apartment units is on the rise, but not many three- and four-bedroom ones are currently available or in development. Newly built three- and four-bedroom apartments are generally too expensive for low-income families such as newly arrived families. Table 1 below compares the number of available bachelor, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartments advertised in Winnipeg as of October 2022.

Table 1. Number of available apartment types - October 2022

Zone	Bachelor	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom
Winnipeg Core	2,890	12,134	6,917	367
Suburban Areas	1,124	17,656	19,943	1,211

It is important to note that the Winnipeg Core is a far smaller geographical area and includes **four central zones** while the Suburban Areas include **eight zones** outside of the inner core of the city. From Table 1 it is clear that the vast majority of apartment units available for rent across the city are 1-bedroom. The number of three-bedroom units available for rent was just 3% of the number of 1-bedroom units available for rent. This shows a significant shortage of the type of unit a larger size newcomer family may need to meet its basic accommodation needs. The data in Table 1 was taken from *the Rental Market Survey – October 2022* by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2022).

Definitions

For the purposes of this assessment, **newcomer** is anyone who was born outside of Canada, regardless of whether they are currently staying in Winnipeg/Manitoba as a permanent or temporary resident. The focus of this study is however squarely on recent newcomers who have arrived in Winnipeg over the past two to five years. This was imposed by the realities on the ground: 80% of all newcomers interviewed for this study have arrived within the past two years. This is because Manitoba, and in particular the city of Winnipeg, have seen a major surge in arrivals primarily because of the war in Ukraine but also partially due to the situation in Afghanistan.

Newcomer participants in this study

- Been in Canada less than five years
- Both temporary and permanent residents
- 80% of newcomers interviewed been here less than two years.

The following definitions have been adopted from CMHC and the Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment Report published by the City of Winnipeg (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirliff, & Sinclair, 2020).

Affordable Housing is a broad term. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, housing is affordable when a household pays 30% or less of its income (before taxes) on housing costs including rent.

Social Housing is housing directly subsidized by government, and owned and operated either by government or a non-profit provider.

Adequate Housing is housing which “does not require any major repairs.” (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirtliffe, & Sinclair, 2020).

Suitable Housing is one with enough bedrooms to accommodate the family.

Core Housing Need a household is in core housing need “if it meets 2 criteria: 1) A household is below one or more of the adequacy, suitability and affordability standards 2) the household would have to spend 30% or more of its before-tax household income to access local housing that meets all three standards” (CMHC, 2023).

Purpose of Needs Assessment

The purpose of this Needs Assessment is threefold:

- Identify the most urgent newcomer housing challenges and their probable causes:
 - to convey the lived experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of newly arrived immigrants regarding housing in the city of Winnipeg
 - to convey the experiences, perceptions, and thoughts of settlement workers about the challenges, recommendations, best practices, and potential solutions to a smooth housing experience for newcomers in Winnipeg.
- Identify areas for collective action
- Share knowledge acquired with all stakeholders

Scope of Needs Assessment

This is a qualitative study of the needs of newcomers to the City of Winnipeg in terms of housing. This is not a comprehensive study because 1) the number of newcomers contacted for this study is limited and 2) no major quantitative analysis was carried out for the purposes of this study. This Needs Assessment was carried out between April and August 2023. It will be followed by a Community Action Plan.

The primary target audience are newcomers to the city of Winnipeg and professionals who work with them. “Newcomers” include people coming to Winnipeg as Privately Sponsored Refugees, Government Assisted Refugees, Federal Skilled Workers, and those who have immigrated through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program. The term also includes Temporary Residents to Permanent Residents as well as non-permanent residents such as International Students, temporary foreign workers, refugee claimants and visitors. Some 80% of the newcomers interviewed for this study have arrived in Winnipeg within the past two years.

As shown in Figure 4 below, some 70% of the newcomer participants in the study come from Ukraine while individuals from Asia (including Afghans) Latin America and Africa made up about 12%, 10% and 8% of the newcomer participants respectively. This combination did not happen by choice.

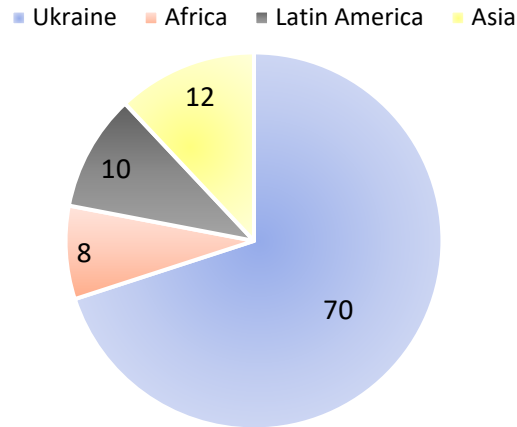
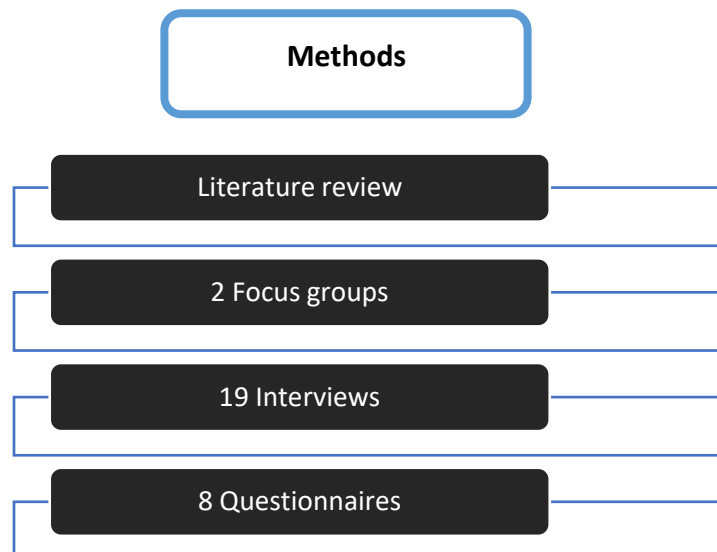


Figure 4. Newcomer participants' area of origin (%)

The timing of the study coincides with a major influx of newcomers from Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict in the country. As a result, groups interviewed for this study included many recent (less than two years) newcomers from Ukraine.

Methodology and Data Sources

We cast a wide net to capture information for this project. Over eighty organizations in Winnipeg were contacted, with twenty-six of them taking part in the effort. The organizations/programs contacted included two private companies, four government entities, twenty non-profit organizations providing direct service to newcomers, four publicly funded institutes of higher education, and fifty-two ethnocultural community organizations. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group meetings. Target audiences were management and staff at newcomer serving organizations, ethnocultural organizations, and individuals who have newly arrived in Winnipeg.



In order to gather data and insights a literature review of existing work was conducted. The following publicly available data were retrieved:

- Statistics on population and number of immigrants in the province of Manitoba and the city of Winnipeg were retrieved from Manitoba Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Canada.
- Average rents, number of rental vacancies, and data on social and affordable housing in Winnipeg and Manitoba was collected from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).
- Frequent site visits were carried out to Central Park and the four zones of downtown Winnipeg.

These publications were also extensively used as references:

- *Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment Report* has been an invaluable resource as it digs deep into the various aspects of housing in Winnipeg (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirtliffe, & Sinclair, 2020).
- *Putting Home at the Heart of Refugee Resettlement* by R. Silvius, E. Halldorson and H. Al-Ubeady (Silvius, Halldorson, & Ataan Al-Ubeady, 2021) provides detailed, valuable insights into lived experiences of former refugees as well as a detailed discussion of the challenges and potential solutions for newcomer housing problems.

Moreover:

- Two focus group discussions were conducted with recent newcomers.
- Twelve in depth interviews were carried out with recent newcomers (less than two years in Winnipeg).
- Five in depth interviews were carried out with newcomer serving organizations.
- Two in depth interviews were conducted with international students, one from the University of Winnipeg and another from the University of Manitoba.
- Questionnaires were handed out and eight were filled out by professionals serving newcomers.
- A Community Meeting was held on Tuesday July 4th 2023 at AMI office at 406 Edmonton Street. The invitees included ethnocultural organizations, relevant government offices and settlement organizations from across Winnipeg. Twelve representatives attended the meeting.
- Insights were gathered from work in other provinces of Canada (e.g., Ottawa Housing Registry).



The complete list of ethnocultural organizations contacted for the purposes of this study can be found on Immigrant Centre Manitoba Inc website at <https://www.icmanitoba.com/resources/ethnocultural-organizations/>.

Data analysis – Rents, availability, and affordable housing

Silvius, Halldorson & Ataan Al-Ubeady (2021) discuss social and affordable housing in Winnipeg in detail and from the perspective of former refugees. Here we use data provided by the Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation (CMHC) to give a quantitative analysis of such housing in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

We start by depicting rent amounts over the past ten years in Winnipeg in Figure 5 below. Each apartment type has its own trend line, and each data point shows average rents for all zones (core and suburban) combined.

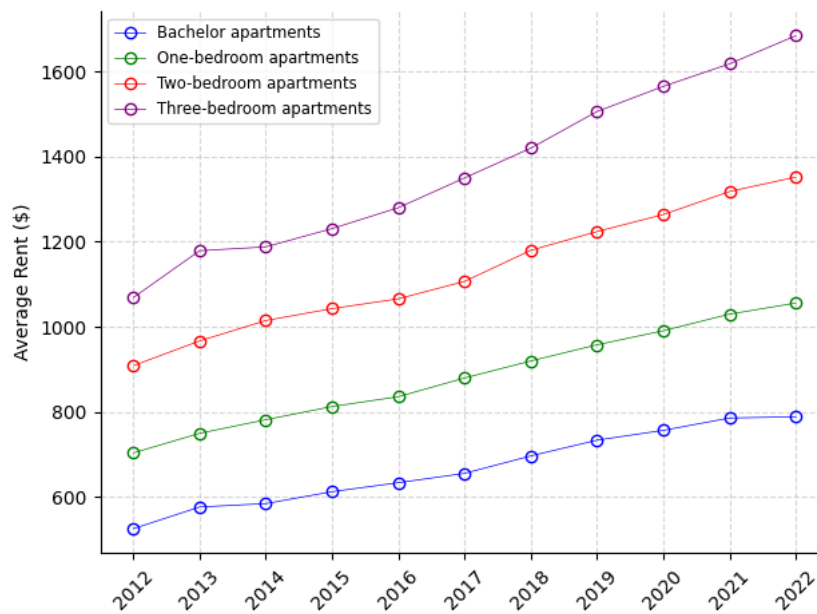


Figure 5. Average rents for apartment types

All four lines show a **general upward trend** in rent from 2012 to 2022, which is typical in many urban Canadian housing markets due to inflation, increased demand, and other economic factors.

For *bachelor apartments* the rent increases consistently but seems to slow down in the last year, going from 786 to 789. For *one-bedroom apartments* there's a noticeable jump in rent in the later years, especially between 2018 and 2019. It continues to rise steadily after that. Similar to the bachelor apartments, *two-bedroom apartments* show a steady increase with some fluctuations, and the trend seems consistent. *Three-bedroom apartments* also show an overall increase, with some years having a more pronounced rise than others. For example, there seems to be a noticeable increase from 2016 to 2017.

In terms of percentage change, it can be seen that **three-bedroom apartments have seen the highest percentage increase at 58%**. One-bedroom apartments are close behind with a 50% increase. Bachelor apartments increased by 49%. Two-bedroom apartments saw the smallest increase, at 48%. These percentages give an overall picture of the rent changes over the ten-year period for each type of

apartment, with three-bedroom units showing the most significant increase. *Two- and three-bedroom types are most relevant to newcomer families* as they tend to be larger in size and require larger units. However, the rent cost is prohibitive for many such families.

A solution to the rent problem might be **social and affordable housing**. However, the stock for such housing is limited, as shown in Figure(s) 6 below.

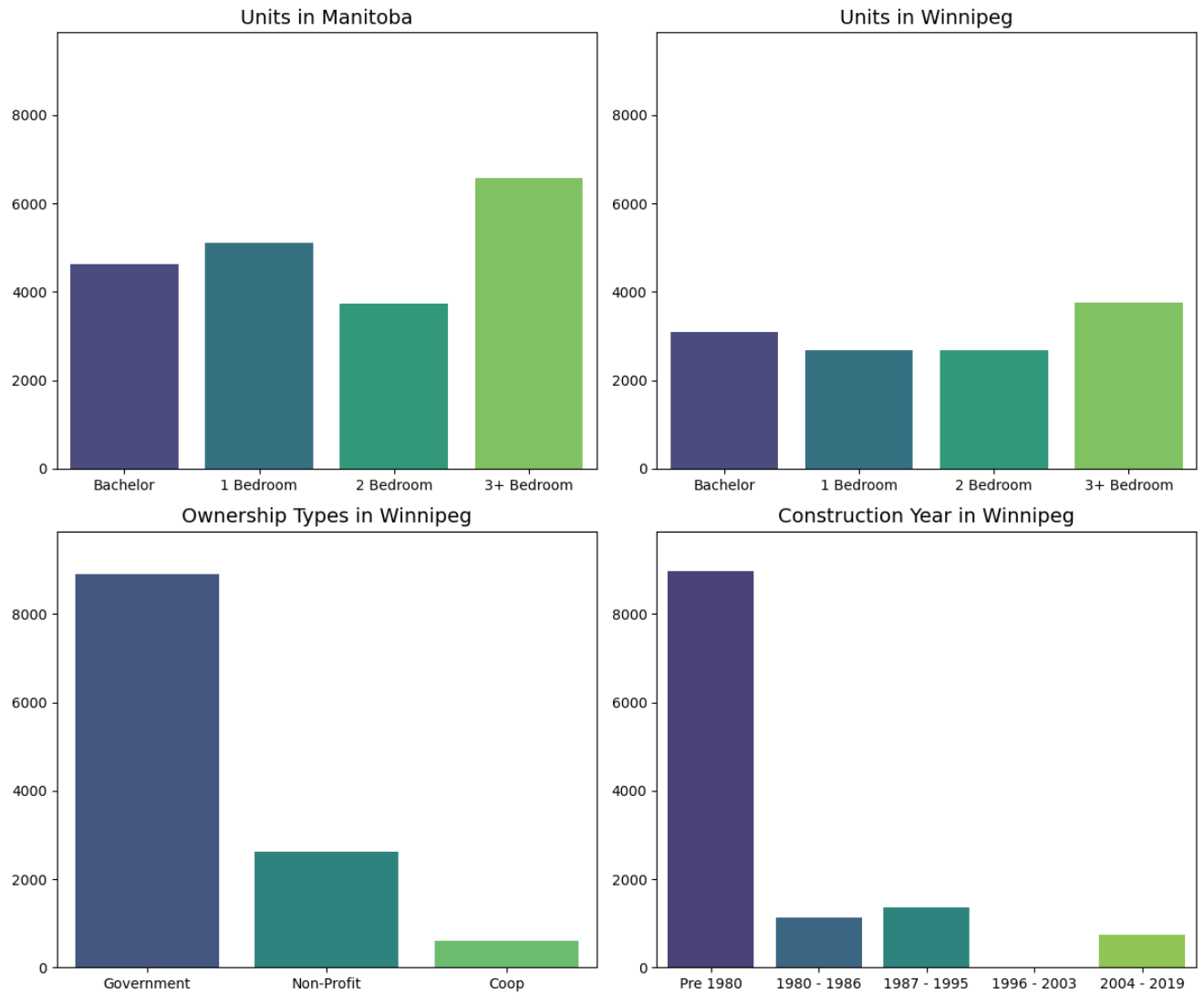


Figure 6. Social and affordable units in Winnipeg and Manitoba

Set 1 shows the number of units in Manitoba. The **most abundant units are 3+ Bedroom** apartments, followed by one-bedroom and bachelor apartments. This makes sense as families are the main beneficiaries. **Two-bedroom units are the least abundant.**

Set 2 shows the number of units in Winnipeg. Again, the most abundant units are 3+ Bedroom units, but contrary to Manitoba, this is followed closely by Bachelor apartments. One- and two-bedroom units are almost equal in number but are significantly lower than the others in Winnipeg.

Set 3 shows the ownership types in Winnipeg. A significant majority of Social and Affordable units in Winnipeg are under government ownership. This point was also made clear by MNPHA. **Cooperative ownership is minimal**, indicating a potential area for development or a reflection of policy or economic factors.

Set 4 shows the construction year in Winnipeg. The **vast majority of Social and Affordable units were built before 1980**, with a substantial drop-off in construction after that. There has been very limited construction of these units from 1996 to 2019, signifying a lack of investment or shift in housing priorities in more recent years.

Overall, it can be concluded that:

Size preference: There's a clear preference or availability for larger 3+ Bedroom units in both Manitoba as a whole and in Winnipeg specifically. This makes good sense and reflects family housing needs.

Ownership distribution: Manitoba Housing ownership dominates, with minimal Cooperative ownership, possibly reflecting policy directions.

Construction stagnation: The significant decline in construction post-1980 signifies a shift in policy, as discussed in (Cooper, 2017). The almost non-existent construction between 1996 and 2019 is a concern for future housing availability, especially for low-income residents.

The *condition* of the social and affordable units that do exist varies significantly. Figure 7 below shows a distribution of these units based on their conditions.

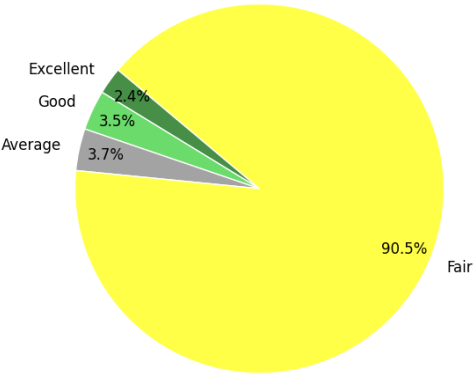


Figure 7. Condition of social and affordable housing units in Winnipeg (2022)

The vast majority of the units are in a fair condition meaning they are usable even though they need repairs.

Average rent amounts for social and affordable units are lower than average market rents. Tables 2, 3 and 4 below show the average rents for these units as well as the percentage of vacant units. Data was taken from CMHC *Social and Affordable Housing Survey* (CMHC, 2022).

Table 2. Average rents for social and affordable housing units

Bachelor	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3+ Bedroom
404	521	533	513

Table 3. Percentage of vacant social and affordable housing units in Manitoba

	Vacant bachelor	Vacant 1 bedroom	Vacant 2 bedroom	Vacant 3+ bedroom	Total vacant
Vacant units	564	361	315	327	1,566
Total units	4,626	5,110	3,744	6,577	20,056
% vacant	12%	7%	8%	5%	8%

Table 4. Percentage of vacant social and affordable housing units in Winnipeg

	Vacant bachelor	Vacant 1 bedroom	Vacant 2 bedroom	Vacant 3+ bedroom	Total vacant
Vacant units	351	160	255	201	967
Total units	3,081	2,678	2,677	3,764	12,200
% vacant	11%	6%	10%	5%	8%

Even though people of Manitoba and Winnipeg experience a shortage of residential units, **not all social and affordable housing units that exist are in use**. In fact, at 7.8%, the **percentage of vacant units in Manitoba is the second highest in Canada**, after Saskatchewan. The average for Canada is 2.5% (CMHC, 2022).

Some 8% of all social and affordable housing units in Manitoba are vacant.

Case Study: a recently arrived Ukrainian family's housing experience

Elena (pseudonym) and her eleven-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter arrived in Winnipeg in Fall 2022. Pre- arrival, the newcomer family from Ukraine had a very optimistic view of housing in Winnipeg. They believed that finding a big, beautiful apartment at a low cost would be a straightforward task. That crime could be an issue in parts of Winnipeg did not even cross their minds.

Upon their arrival, the family found temporary shelter at a hotel provided by the Province of Manitoba, but they soon realized that finding a long-term rental apartment was more complicated than they had anticipated. Rental agencies required credit, rental, or employment history, which the family lacked as newcomers to Canada.

Elena knew nobody in Winnipeg so one day she decided to just walk into a church and talk to people there. Luckily her English was good enough so she could communicate, although slowly and with some difficulty. She met a couple who were very helpful and told her about a settlement office nearby. Soon she visited the settlement agency, which provided advice and support for her regarding how to look for housing, and for a job. Through the agency, she discovered New Journey Housing, a non-profit organization specializing in housing support for newcomers.

Elena was lucky to get a job within a month while also looking for an apartment to rent. Someone had told her she'd need separate rooms for her son and daughter but the average rent for a three-bedroom apartment was \$1795 per month which she could not possibly afford. Even a two-bedroom at about \$1550 a month was too expensive so she ended up getting a one bedroom in downtown Winnipeg for \$1090 a month. She did not have a car so being downtown meant being closer to bus routes and other amenities. The building was old and it sometimes got too cold in winter and too hot in summer. The hydro bill was expensive. On the streets, the family sometimes saw car windows smashed. That never happened back home and came to them as a shock.

After almost one year of perseverance and hard work, Elena managed to secure a better, two-bedroom apartment in a neighborhood not far from downtown.

The new apartment provided more space and comfort. With the newfound stability, they made the decision to purchase a car, which meant greater independence and flexibility to explore the city and its surroundings.

In hindsight, they wished they had access to an online portal, perhaps a Facebook page or a community forum, where they could interact with current residents of Winnipeg. Such a platform would have allowed them to ask questions, seek advice, and gain a better understanding of what to expect regarding housing and life in the city. Interacting with Winnipeg residents before arrival would have helped them set more realistic expectations.

Although Elena works, her income is not high so she has begun the process of applying for affordable housing, understanding that this might be a lengthy process with various organizations and waitlists. So far, she has filled out applications for two organizations that offer affordable housing. She will apply to a few others too when she gets the chance. Currently the family are happy. Even though they met difficulties they did not expect, now they think the future is bright. The kids go to school and Elena hopes they become permanent residents soon. Who knows, she says; maybe they buy a beautiful house in a few years.

Neighborhood profile: Central Park as a neighborhood where many newcomers live

The majority of newcomers coming to Winnipeg settle within or near the inner city as they first arrive, in order to be closer to amenities. Also, as mentioned previously, rents are somewhat less in older buildings in the area: as of July 2023, a Google search showed that the average rent in downtown Winnipeg for a two-bedroom apartment in an older building is about \$1200 while the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment elsewhere in Winnipeg is close to \$1750.

At the heart of downtown Winnipeg is the Central Park, which is surrounded by the Central Park neighborhood. This neighborhood is home to “the largest concentration of black Canadians in Manitoba who are mostly immigrants and refugees of African decent” (Garang, 2021). The neighborhood is not large. Every part of it is within a walking distance of several minutes, but it is one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Winnipeg.



Figure 8. Knox Church is one of the more majestic buildings in the Central Park neighborhood. AMI office is to the right.

There are at least two abandoned buildings in the Central Park area. Centre Village is a 25-unit housing complex built in 2010 at a cost of \$3.7 million dollars. It was specifically meant to house newcomers and low-income families. Unfortunately, the building was vacant by 2021 due to several issues. One major problem was security, with unit windows being smashed often and an average of one emergency call per week being made to the police (Kives, 2022). A security fence around the building may have helped families living there be more secure, but it was not built until after all tenants had left the building (Dow, 2023).

Parkview Place was a seniors care home but it was abandoned in August 2022 after a deadly Covid outbreak took place in the building. It is currently unclear if the building will be put to use again (Rosen, 2022).



Figure 9. Parkview Building in Central Park is currently (June 2023) vacant.

Safety is a concern that came up in almost all interviews with newcomers and settlement workers who live and/or work in or around the Central Park neighborhood. The website Area Vibes tracks the crime rate per neighborhood (<https://www.areavibes.com/>). The following are directly quoted from the website, retrieved on July 23, 2023:

- Central Park crime rates are 122% higher than the national average

- Violent crimes in Central Park are 148% higher than the national average
- In Central Park you have a 1 in 11 chance of becoming a victim of crime
- Central Park is safer than 0% of the cities in Manitoba

Several non-profit organizations have their offices in the Central Park area. The neighborhood includes the Portage Place which up until the start of the Covid pandemic was a busy mall with many stores and a crowded food court. The Knox Church is a prominent building in the neighborhood that provides space for various programs for newcomer youth and adults. Altered Minds Inc is located at 406 Edmonton Street which is right next to the Knox Church.

Eyewitness accounts and interviews with settlement workers suggest that the Covid pandemic impacted downtown Winnipeg more than any other part of the city of Winnipeg. Downtown is no longer as busy during summer days as before Covid. Even though there are many offices downtown, the rise in working from home means fewer people need to be downtown. Perhaps the clearest example is the transformation of the Portage Place. While before the pandemic it was a bustling mall, it is currently in a dire state where many shops have closed and the food court is not as busy. A volunteer group called Downtown Recovery Group meets on a regular basis to discuss potential solutions for improving the situation including ways to better utilize the once thriving Portage Place.

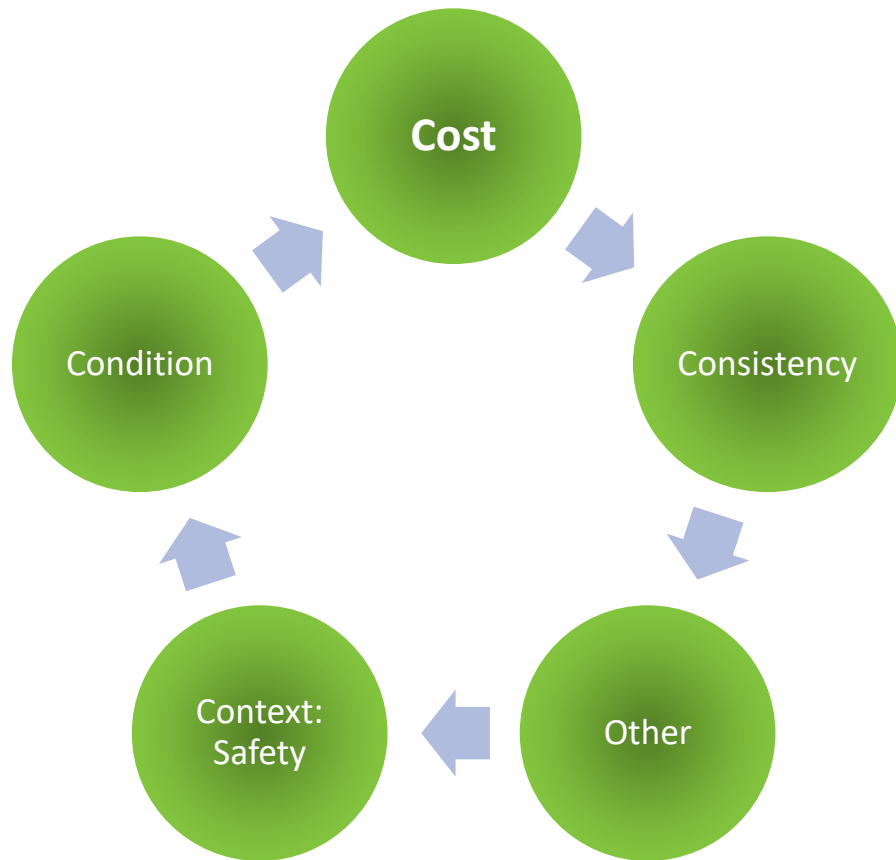
Key Issues Identified

Challenges finding the right place to live in Winnipeg start before newcomers have arrived in the city. Knowing that they must have a place to go to upon arrival, they start searching for a rental place right after they know for sure their visa has been approved and that they will be going to Winnipeg.

Skilled immigrants who arrive into the province through the Federal Skilled Worker or Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program may be better able to buy houses within the first five years of their arrival as they on average own more assets and get higher paying jobs due to their education and skills. Immigrants who arrive as government or privately sponsored refugees have on average lower assets and skills and generally take longer to buy a house. The overwhelming majority of newcomers (everyone except for two) participating in this Needs Assessment said they were renting or started off as renters when they arrived.

What follows is a discussion of the most pressing housing issues prioritized based on how widespread they are, and their severity and impact. These reflect the needs of newcomers as stated by newcomer individuals, community organizations, and newcomer serving organizations.

Issues are categorized by affordability (cost and availability) conditions (safety, cleanliness) consistency (residential stability) and context (neighborhood opportunity).



Affordability is a major problem for newcomers. According to a report by the City of Winnipeg (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirliffe, & Sinclair, 2020) 36% of immigrants who have arrived within the past five years spend at least 30% or more of their income towards housing costs. **This is the highest proportion of any household types in the city of Winnipeg**, meaning newcomers in general pay the highest portion of their income as rent. According to this same report [page 102], housing needs are concentrated in the core of the city which is where many immigrants usually settle at first upon arrival. Interviews and discussions in this study mostly confirmed this view. The chart below highlights the key findings on affordability. Sources for the first and fourth entries are the report by the City of Winnipeg (same as above), and an online search by the authors in July 2023, respectively.

36% of newcomer households pay 30% or more of income on rent

Newcomer families use child benefit towards rent. Percentage unknown

Newcomers tend to have larger family sizes

Median rent for one bedroom \$1179, for three bedroom \$1795. Good luck with four

~ 70% not aware of Residential Tenancies Branch or exact laws

~ 50% not aware of rent assist programs/affordable housing options

Affordable housing applications take too long; "then you receive a single call"

In one focus group, participating newcomers said anywhere from 50 – 70 percent of their income goes to rent plus utilities. The percentage of course depends on what wages one gets and what kind of place one rents, but that was their best guess. It was mentioned that if you have kids, they cause noise or damage which may lead to more financial issues. New arrivals with babies that need daycare or newcomers who own pets face extra problems. "When searching for an apartment to rent, having a pet limited the number of available options by far, probably from 120 listings down to only 20" one participant said of her search for a rental apartment in Winnipeg.

Newcomers attending a second focus group said rent is about 50% of their income if they are alone and make about the minimum wage.

One issue brought up by service providing organizations was that **single women with young kids** who are still not of school age (are less than 6 years old) have much bigger problems that are specific to them because they must stay with their young kids and so cannot work, but at the same time they must pay for rent and for everything else. As a result, they are faced with a dilemma: to work or not to work.

While there exist rental subsidy programs, according to the province of Manitoba's Department of Families, only Canadian citizens and permanent residents qualify for Rent Assist from the Province

(https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/eia/rent_assist.html). Specifically, this means newcomers arriving in Canada on a work permit as well as international students do not qualify for rent assist.

Newcomers are not fully aware of existing rent assist programs: “Financial assistance for rent is piecemeal, complicated and inconsistent across newcomer groups” as one participant put it.

Some 40% of the newcomers in this study did not have a clear understanding of the rent assist program(s). One reason may be that many were recent arrivals from Ukraine who do not qualify for rent assist because they are not yet permanent residents or have not been in the country long enough. For an extended discussion of the rent assist program(s) in Winnipeg please see (Silvius, Halldorson, & Ataan Al-Ubeady, 2021).

Newcomers are not aware of the support structures that exist for renters: Some 70% of the newcomer participants were not aware of the Residential Tenancies Branch, a Government of Manitoba department, or the exact laws surrounding what landlords are and are not allowed to ask applicants for.

Newcomers tend to have larger family sizes: Newcomers tend to have more family members on average, including kids. Some families also include grandparents. Affordability is an even bigger problem for larger families because they need three- or four-bedroom apartments or even houses. There are not many such apartments available in Winnipeg and not many are in development. The three-bedroom apartments that do exist are on average 35% percent more expensive than one-bedroom apartments, according to an online market survey of rental prices in Winnipeg carried out by the authors during July 2023. According to a City of Winnipeg report (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirliff, & Sinclair, 2020) [page 46] larger dwellings tend to be outside of the city core, while many new immigrant families tend to live within or close to the inner city for at least the first few years of their arrival.

Separate rooms for children older than five years of age that are of different genders: At least half the newcomer participants in the study thought that there is a legal requirement in Canada (Winnipeg) that children older than five years who are of different genders must have separate rooms. All participants agreed that this is too strict a law that makes renting a place for low-income families with kids nearly impossible. Almost everyone with more than one child said they had to ignore this so-called law. Interestingly, this is NOT a legal requirement. The confusion is likely due to recommendations in the National Occupancy Standard for what is *Suitable Housing*. One criterion is (National Occupancy Standard, 2023) “Household members under 5 years of age of the opposite sex may share a bedroom if doing so would reduce the number of required bedrooms.” The Standard however makes it clear that “the National Occupancy Standard should not be used to restrict access to housing”.

Newcomer families use child benefits towards paying rent: It is unclear what percentage of newcomer families do so, but it does happen, as per housing counsellors and newcomer participants in this study. This issue was raised in focus group meetings. For privacy reasons, individual participants were not asked whether they used child benefits towards rent. According to the government of Canada (Canada Child Benefit, 2023), temporary residents, such as newcomers on a work permit or international students, must have continuously lived in Canada for 18 months before their kids qualify for Canada Child Benefit.

Transitional housing (i.e. staying in funded hotels) is only available to some newcomers: Those who have arrived under the Canada – Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) or the Special Immigration Measures (SIM) for Afghans can live in government funded hotel rooms when they first

arrive. For Afghans, this is expected to last only three weeks, though that limit is not always enforced. For CUAET, the first 30 days are funded provincially and they can get an extra 2 weeks, funded by the Federal Government. This initiative makes the transition to life in Canada easier as beneficiary newcomers do not have to worry about a place to sleep when they arrive. This is NOT the case for all groups of newcomers. Privately sponsored newcomers do not receive this government benefit. Instead, their individual or community sponsors must provide housing for them for at least one year or until they are financially self sufficient, whichever happens first.

No social connections: “*Completely alone*” was how about 70% of all newcomer participant described themselves upon first arriving in Winnipeg. This is not to say they all came as lone individuals. Rather, even when coming together with family members, they realized they had zero social connections in the city.

The solutions newcomer participants described were ingenious. Some 30% of the participants said they used connections to friends or family who already lived in Winnipeg. Those who had no friends or family in Winnipeg mentioned that they walked into a church, found community organizations, went to settlement service providing organizations or even approached strangers on the street. People also used connections at their newly found jobs to get better rental places and/or as co-signers.

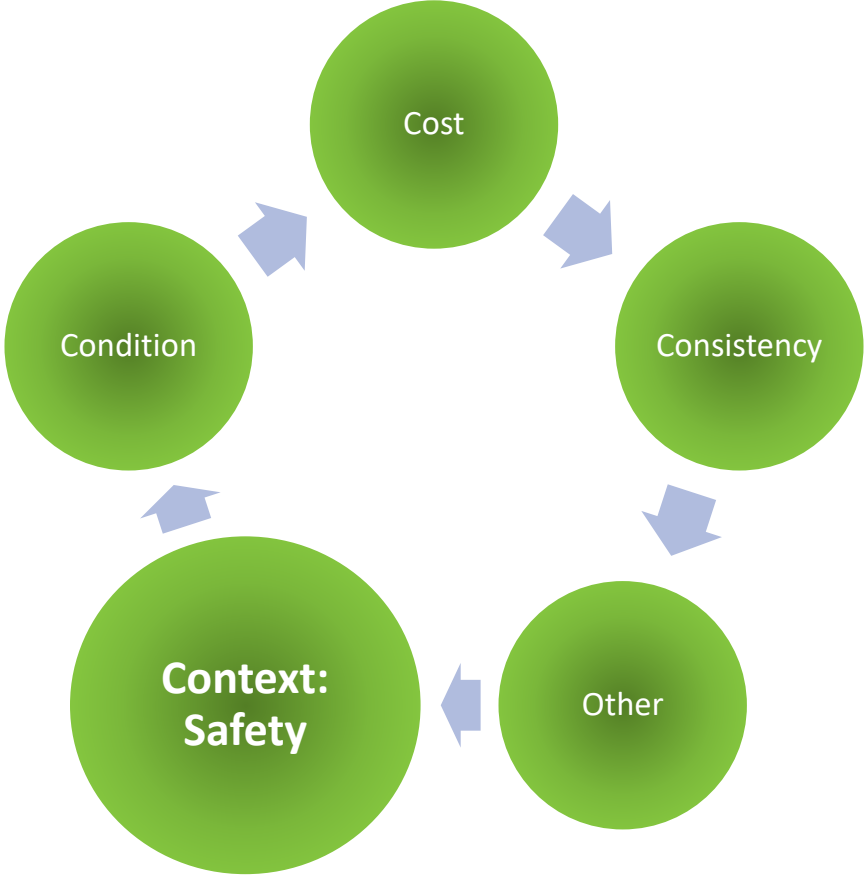
No credit history: Many landlords rely on strict rules, and applicants must meet strict requirements. Obviously, people who just arrive in Canada for the first time and land in Winnipeg have no previous history of rent or house ownership in Canada. Moreover, they have not had a job in Canada before. Some landlords require that they show proof of previous work experience or previous rent history in Canada. Clearly, this cannot be satisfied. Also, applicants must show a rent-income ratio that is above a certain threshold. This can be discriminatory.

Some 20% of newcomer participants said that their landlords did not require them to provide proof of work/rental history. Others used friends or family in Winnipeg as co-signers. Those who did not have friends or family and were asked to provide such proof resorted to asking fellow church goers or other community members they managed to get to know for help. Two participants said they asked their employers for support, which they received. Once newcomers work for some time and have a work history, it becomes easier for them to be approved to rent units they want. Some participants said they just needed to show their bank statements (showing they have funds to pay rent) instead of rental history. A few participants who had no connections to ask for help used their savings to pay two or three months of rent in advance.

The need to be close to bus routes and amenities: Newcomers do not own a car when they land in Winnipeg. Some 40% of the participants in this study mentioned that they have access to cars. The rest, mostly newer ones, take the bus. Living in and around downtown makes it easier for them to access buses. Moreover, many settlement programs have offices in or around downtown which makes it more convenient for newcomers to access them if they live downtown.

Social and affordable housing applications take too long: It is unclear exactly how long applications take. Processing times differ based on how urgent an individual’s or a family’s needs are. As per one partner organization that deals with high needs newcomer families, when applicants are contacted, they receive one single call from Manitoba Housing “If they miss this call, they have missed their place in the queue.”

The Manitoba Non Profit Housing Association represents over 100 organizations that offer some 24,000 affordable housing units across Manitoba. Each of these organizations however, has their own application system meaning anyone applying to more than one of these must complete multiple applications.



Neighborhood Safety came up often as an issue in discussions with newly arrived immigrants and refugees. Almost 100% of the participants mention that they did not think, before arrival, that neighborhoods in Canada might have a crime issue. The chart below shows highlights of the key findings on Context or Neighborhood Safety.

~ 100% did not initially think Canadian neighborhoods have a crime issue

~ 80% expressed a negative view of downtown in terms of safety

~12% of those here for less than two years have experienced smashed car windows

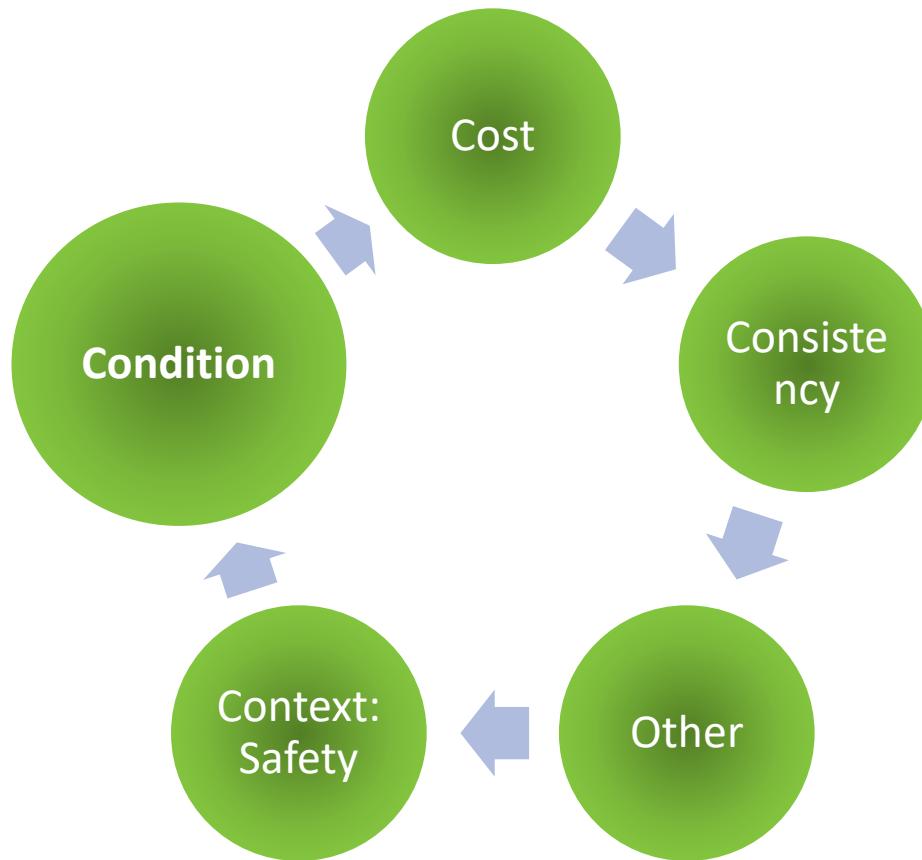
"I was shocked to see beggars and hear stories of violent crime"

"Back home you park on the street. Car windows are never smashed"

Newcomers are surprised to see crime and experience not very clean neighborhoods. Some 80% of the newcomers interviewed for this study said the scenes of car windows being smashed or garbage on streets was totally unexpected. Almost all said they did not think such issues occur in Canada. Newcomers from Ukraine said these incidents are not common occurrences in Ukraine and that they were shocked to see them happen in Canada.

Downtown is not considered very safe: Some 80% of the newcomers interviewed expressed a negative view of downtown Winnipeg in terms of safety, because of what they said were crime related incidents. In one focus group with newcomers who lived in and around the downtown area, in which 16 people participated, at least two participants had their family car windows broken and small items stolen. In another focus group with 12 participants who lived in a neighborhood several kilometers outside downtown, at least one participant had witnessed that the windows of multiple cars on one street had been smashed.

According to representatives from the Winnipeg Police, Winnipeg is growing very fast but the increase in the number of police officers has not kept pace with the city's growth. While downtown is perceived in a negative light, its crime rate is comparable with newer areas of the city. The police usually react with some delay to breaking in, stolen belongings and vandalism because they prioritize responding to violent crimes such as stabbing.



Conditions: According to CMHC (CMHC, 2023), *core housing need* is defined as when families pay 30% or more of their before-tax income on housing needs, or their house/rental units need major repairs, or when their house/apartment does not have enough rooms to adequately accommodate all members of the family, including children. 26% of immigrants who have arrived within the past five years are in core housing need (Carter, Janzen, McCullough, Shirtliffe, & Sinclair, 2020) [page 17].

As per the same study by the City of Winnipeg [page 17], the greatest housing needs are found in the inner city where most buildings are older. The number of houses and apartments in need of major repair is on average larger in the inner city than in other areas of the city while the average rent is somewhat lower. Many newcomer families with low income tend to live here but even with the lower average rent, they may still be in core housing need because of their housing's conditions. The key findings regarding housing conditions are highlighted in the chart below. The first entry in the chart is taken from the report by the City of Winnipeg. All other entries are about the newcomer participants in this study.

26% of recent newcomers are **in core housing need** (2020)

~ 60% of families in this study do not have enough rooms

~ 70% agree pictures on ads are often misleading

~ 40% say hydro bill is too high. 10% say their units are cold

~ 20% say their buildings are not cleaned properly

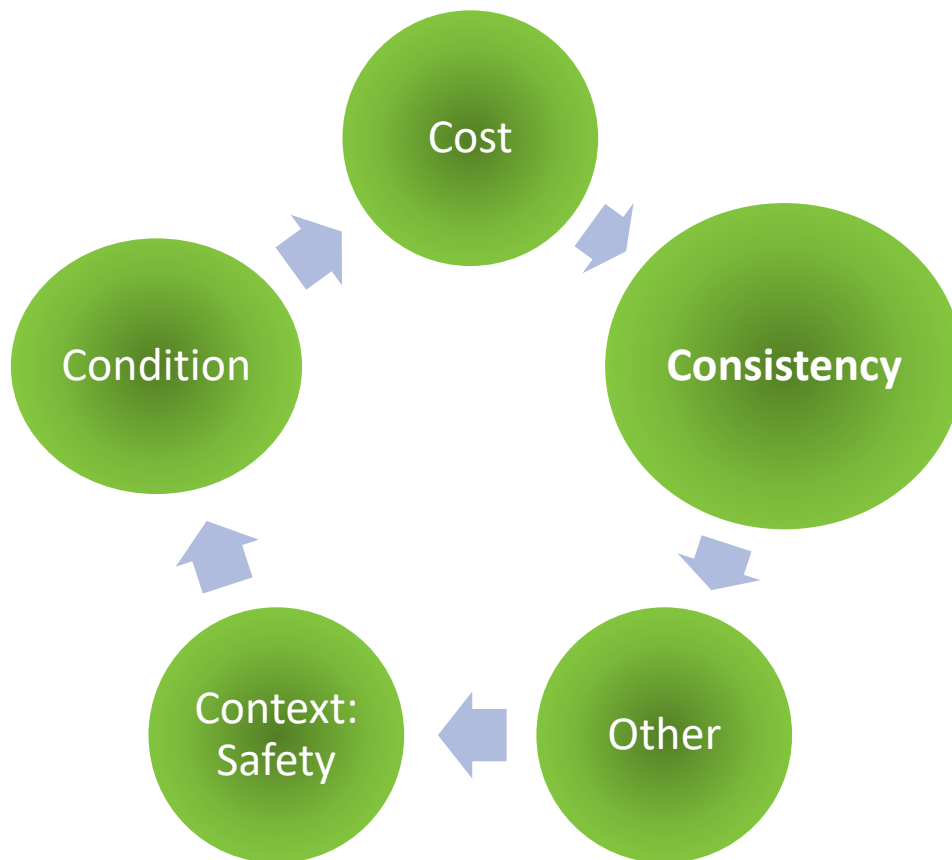
~ 10% have heard of, or experienced, bed bugs

Some 70% newcomers in the study mentioned that while looking for rental apartments they realized that pictures on rental ads are often misleading. 10% complained that their units are cold and 40% said hydro costs are too high. Also, pests (mostly bed bugs) have been a problem for some 10% of the participants. And about 20% complained that cleaning (of their building) is not good.

In terms of neighborhood, 15% of the participants said their neighbors are noisy and another 20% said their neighbors put trash on the yard. Participants, overall, feel safe in their homes.

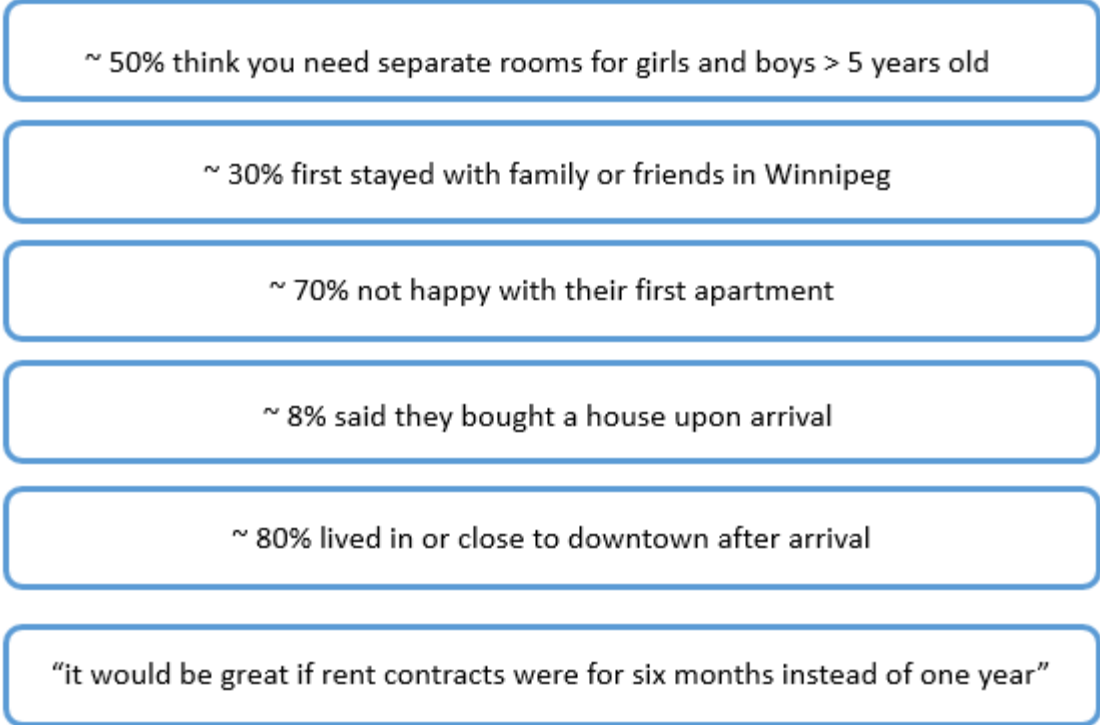
While living downtown is good for newly arrived families, because it is close to everything they need, one major problem is that **25% of newcomer families living downtown reported that their kids growing up get involved in risky behavior**. Such reports were almost nonexistent from families not living downtown.

Overall, it appears that **most newcomers are not fully satisfied with the first rental unit they get upon arrival**. One key issue brought up by about 60% of them was that they do not have enough rooms in their unit.



Consistency is a measure of housing stability: are occupants satisfied with their current apartment or house and as a result do they seek to stay at their current place for the foreseeable future?

All newcomer participants in the study spoke of the fact that they must find a place as soon as they arrive, regardless of the condition of the unit. *“You need a place to stay, regardless of when you arrived and whether you can afford it. You need a place first. Then other things”* as one recently arrived newcomer put it. For government supported newcomers, such as recent arrivals from Ukraine, this was made easier by the fact that they could stay at hotels paid for by the government of Canada for three weeks or longer until they found a place. Some 20% of the newcomers in this study said they stayed in a hotel for more than three weeks. Non-government sponsored newcomers said that, upon arrival, they had to rely on relatives or other social connections such as churches or benevolent people they met online, with whom they stayed until they found a place to rent. The key challenges identified by newcomers regarding housing consistency are highlighted in the chart below.



As discussed earlier, almost everyone who had kids thought they are required by law to have separate rooms for children of different genders above 5 years of age. This is a recommendation but not a law.

Some 60% of the newcomers said they did not have enough rooms in their unit. The belief that they may need separate rooms for children of different genders made the situation worse in their eyes. The sense that they do not have enough space in their-rentals strongly hints at the fact that they may be looking to relocate when they have the ability. Thus, newcomer rental experience is quite fluid, at least within the first two years of arrival, and there is significant rental uncertainty i.e. people have a place but there’s a sense that they will be there temporarily and only until they have the means to have a better (more spacious, better condition) place.

All participants agreed that staying in hotels upon arrival can be very helpful. They suggested that being able to stay in a hotel for the first month of arrival allows them to look for and potentially get a job. It was mentioned that once they have a job in Winnipeg, it becomes *much* easier to get a rental place.

A relatively small percentage of the newcomer participants i.e. only about 10% knew about the website Kijiji upon arrival. The majority (>90%) used Facebook to find their first rental place. 20% of the participants used Airbnb or realtor.ca as well (the latter to buy).

Some 20% of the newcomer participants said it would be **better if lease agreements were not for a year but rather for six months only**. That way they could get any place at first just so they have a space to live in, and then look more carefully for a better place for the long term.

Almost all participants said connections in the city are very important upon arrival, though not all have had such connections.

Family or friends can act as rental guarantors as well. About 45% of the participants in the two newcomer focus group discussions mentioned that social connections such as relatives who already lived in Winnipeg, churches, or friends they made in Winnipeg, and even employers helped them rent a place usually by signing as guarantor or by helping them find a proper place. Relatives also sometimes house newcomers until they find a place. Participants say that having family or friends at whose place one stays upon arrival, until one finds their footing in the city, is a good experience. However, it was mentioned by a community worker participant that **staying with relative can and does lead to tension** over time.

All social connections with non-family were made informally, after arrival. A successful example of a more systematic way of connecting newcomers to residents willing to help is the **204 Facebook forum** for the Filipino community in Winnipeg. The group has over 50,000 members that include those seeking help and those willing to help.

It was mentioned that **people with disabilities** in general and newcomers with disabilities in particular have a very **difficult time finding accessible accommodation**.

One issue brought up in interviews with service providing partners was that the changes in Manitoba Health card application in 2019 had added to the challenges for newcomers. “A tenancy agreement of at least 6 months is one of the accepted means of showing residency when applying for health card” meaning there is extra pressure on new arrivals to find housing soon after arrival.

Some of the challenges identified did not strictly fall under any of the four categories and are listed under **Other Challenges** here.

English language barriers: Some 20% of the newcomer participants in this study mentioned their limited English language capabilities as one reason that made finding a place and communicating with rental companies/landlords difficult.

High-Needs families: A segment of newcomer families experience more difficulties than usual and are considered high-needs. High-needs families are usually large families with several kids who mostly experience major difficulties within the first year of their arrival, including one or more of: very low English levels, families facing eviction, people with undiagnosed mental health issues, food insecurity, having to deal with Child and Family Services, and domestic violence. Housing is a major issue that comes up often for settlement workers who work with high-needs families. Some families are unable to pay rent and face eviction, “which essentially means their life is falling apart.” Most such families are on Employment and Income Assistance. EIA has not increased while prices have, which means sometimes EIA is not enough even to cover the full rent.

For families that face with eviction, women and kids are referred to shelters. The problem is these clients usually have very low English levels meaning they cannot communicate at shelters because shelters do not have, and probably cannot have, interpreters due to funding and logistics issues. Also, food may be another issue for those who need Halal food.

Sometimes families live in places with insufficient conditions. For example, the existence of mice or insects was brought up by a few service-providing organizations who deal with lower income – usually single mom - newcomer families.

Low-income families that are on Manitoba Housing list must sometimes wait “up to three to four years,” and when it’s their turn “*they receive one single call which if they miss, their chance is gone*” as described by one service-providing organization.

Newcomers who want to buy a home lack information about home maintenance in Canada. For example, keeping a home too hot can result in mould as well as very expensive heating bills if there is poor insulation.

Muslim newcomers who can afford to buy a house often are unable to get a mortgage because their faith prohibits them from paying interest. It was noted in our community meeting that one credit union in Manitoba has a “Muslim mortgage set up so that the borrower is paying “profit” instead of “interest”.

Referring to the fact that there are **vacant buildings that are not made available to the rental market,** and/or not being used at all, a question was brought up in our community meeting that “why is there no regulation or not enough regulation for unused residential property?”

Recommendations

For each identified issue and its causes, study participants were asked to recommend potential solutions. More than one solution was usually suggested for each issue. Participants were requested to **suggest solutions that primarily rely on existing resources** and how they may be better leveraged.

Collaborative Affordable Housing Registry: The Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association has over 100 member agencies that offer over 24,000 social and affordable housing units in Manitoba. The biggest by far is Manitoba Housing with over 17,000 units. Each one of these agencies has its own application procedures which makes applying to more than one very time consuming and labor intensive, especially for newcomers whose English level is not limited.

The Province of Manitoba, affordable housing providers and community organization stakeholders have been in discussions, through MNPHA, regarding how best to approach and implement such a collaborative affordable housing registry. A successful example already in existence is the Ottawa Housing Registry (Ottawa Housing Registry, 2023).

According to MNPHA, one key challenge is that many providers have different requirements. To address this challenge, MNPHA has suggested the creation of an Advisory Committee made up of non-profit housing providers, community organizations and Manitobans, including newcomers, experiencing barriers accessing affordable housing.

In discussions with key stakeholders, it is generally believed that the creation of a collaborative affordable housing registry is a yearslong process and requires various preparatory steps to lay the groundwork.

It was recommended that any coordinated affordable housing registry should include supports for newcomers such as debt counselling and information on living in Canada. Further, it was recommended that a *Rent Smart* program be included where people on the waitlist are assessed for their needs and given priority accordingly. Such a process is already in existence at Manitoba Housing, but it could be improved. Finally, supports should also exist for landlords and not just renters.

New Journey Housing is a resource centre that aids and guides newcomers to Manitoba, with a focus on Winnipeg, to rent or purchase housing that suits their budget. New Journey Housing is the only

organization in Winnipeg solely dedicated to providing housing support and advice to newcomers, and they also serve those immigrants who are yet to arrive in Manitoba.

Many other service providing organizations refer clients to NJH for housing advice and support. NJH has a limited number of full-time employees. Limitations in NJH staffing restricts how many newcomers they can serve at any given time. More funding for NJH as well as for housing programs at other service providing organizations will go a long way in ensuring more newcomers receive the kind of support they need when looking to rent or buy in Winnipeg.

More education and advocacy are needed. It is not only the responsibilities of the tenants, but also the responsibilities of the landlords that must be made well known and followed through. Newcomers should be educated on 1) their rights and responsibilities 2) rights and responsibilities of the landlords and 3) the path of action should issues arise.

Landlords must be educated and regularly reminded about what they must provide. There should be more landlord accountability for providing safe environments of living. It is equally important to **talk to the landlords and caretakers** and listen to their suggestions and side of the story as well.

SOPA is under-utilized: SOPA stands for Settlement Online Pre-Arrival and is offered, among others, by Altered Minds Inc to newcomers *before they leave for Canada*. The program is available to those destined to arrive in Manitoba (and Canada in general) as permanent residents and does include a discussion of what to expect when renting. SOPA provides a realistic view of life in Manitoba. However, SOPA facilitators interviewed for this study suggested that **the program is under-utilized**. It was suggested that it should be made available not just to permanent residents but also to all temporary residents destined for Manitoba (Canada), since most choose to become permanent residents. **SOPA is an official source of reliable information** and support for future permanent residents, allowing them to adjust faster and make informed choices. SOPA facilitators meet with clients online, before they have departed for Canada, and answer all their questions and provide them with instructions and referrals. The number of clients for SOPA is currently not high and **the program is ripe to serve more newcomers pre-arrival using existing resources**.

Pre-arrival orientation programs such as **SOPA should to be better advertised** so they are better known by newcomers.

Interactive Facebook Page: Volunteers from the Winnipeg Filipino community have created a Facebook page called [204 Filipino Forum and Marketplace](#), where newcomers can interact with residents of Winnipeg (Manitoba) and discuss any questions they have regarding housing. The page has some 55,000 members. More than one participant for this study suggested various versions of an online portal specifically for newcomers to Winnipeg, which they can use *before* arrival. Information on renting rules, responsibilities, rights, and resources may be posted on such a portal and prospective newcomers can interact with residents so they obtain a more realistic view of life in Winnipeg (204 Filipino Forum, 2023).

One participant suggested that a portal may be created on the Province of Manitoba's website where up to date information about rental agencies in Winnipeg and across the province are listed in different languages. This may even include listing of all rental properties available on the market.

Newcomer orientation is not unified and centralized: “People fall through the cracks” as one settlement worker put it. Often, newcomers are provided with self-study booklets (usually online) with A LOT of information. Many things can be lost in between the lines.

Entry Program as the Newcomer Orientation Hub: One recommendation, voiced by several participants, has been to bring back the Entry Program where newcomers received information sessions on key issues, including housing, right after landing in Winnipeg. Interpretation services were provided which made it easy for everyone, whether they spoke good English or not, to benefit from the information sessions. Entry Program had created a **bottleneck, in a positive sense**, that most newcomers went through. As a result, any service providing organization whose work covered issues of importance to new arrivals could and did take part in the program.

Pamphlets on main housing challenges and what to expect, in multiple common languages should be distributed online or in hard copies to newcomers as part of their pre-arrival orientation.

One recommendation discussed at the community meeting was the need for a **mechanism to check the condition of rental units**. It may be done by paid staff or even by volunteers from the community or by residents to provide regular and honest reporting to the regulating and law enforcing organizations such as the Residential Tenancies Branch, the Department of Health, or the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

In addition to regular checks of conditions of the units, the level of **satisfaction among tenants and landlords may be measured** as well. This does not have to involve the government and may be done by community organizations.

In cases where Rent Assist is involved for EIA clients and the money goes directly to the landlord, the EIA program is advised to check the conditions of the units regularly. Currently, where the EIA money goes and if the services are provided at a required level are not checked.

Many newcomers do not know that they can **contact their MLA, MP and City Counsellors** with complaints and concerns. This should be made known to them.

Residential Tenancies Branch takes a very long time to reply to tenants’ enquiries and complaints. It was recommended at the community meeting that perhaps students should be hired to **streamline the communication**. Or perhaps community volunteers should help newcomers communicate with RTB.

There are kind and caring landlords in Winnipeg maintaining their buildings in good conditions. A mechanism for **landlords to share best practices** will ensure landlords learn from one another.

Landlord appreciation initiatives will highlight such best practices and encourage landlords to adopt higher standards of service. These could take the form of material rewards, awarding titles, stars to the buildings (similar to stars for hotels), and recognition in publications.

Increased accountability for the use of public funding: Companies which use public funding to develop affordable housing should be held accountable. In our community meeting, the name of at least one development company was mentioned which reportedly used public funding for construction with the promise to have affordable units included in their residential buildings downtown Winnipeg. “The funding was used, but no affordable units emerged” as one participant put it.

Accountability for unused property: There are owners/landlords in multiple unit buildings who do not rent out part of their buildings or use it in any way at all, and there are vacant buildings. It was suggested

that “why is there no regulation or not enough regulation about unused residential property or potentially residential property?” More public attention to this issue may lead to increased accountability to the public.

Racial Profiling/Cultural Profiling is perceived to happen, although it is hard to measure. Newcomers should be informed that in cases of suspected racial/cultural profiling the Manitoba Human Rights Commission should be contacted.

Review the down payment assistance program provided by Manitoba Housing so that newcomers can purchase their first home. The amount provided by the program is inadequate for today’s housing costs and the eligibility criteria needs to be broadened so that more people are eligible for the program.

Manitoba Housing needs to **better promote the programs they have**. Many programs have complicated and not well-known eligibility requirements and are therefore currently undersubscribed. The Employment and Income Assistance program should also have a role here to promote the programs that exist and make sure they are available to the people who need them.

Guarantors: Many newcomer participants mentioned that one difficulty in obtaining their first rental apartment was that landlords had asked for a guarantor. It was suggested at our community meeting that the government or specific organizations may act as “guarantor” when newcomers get their first rental housing. We have learned that one resource does exist to specifically address this barrier. The Jubilee Fund (<https://www.jubileefund.ca/about-us/>) does offer rent guarantee to qualified applicants. Moreover, the Manitoba Rent Relief Fund (<https://manitobahelps.com/>) provides support to renters who have difficulty paying rent or utilities. More promotion of these programs to make newcomers aware is needed.

Furniture: A list of stores that provide furniture, including ones that provide less expensive options should be made available to newcomers. Include any non-profit organization that provides donated furniture to newcomers.

The IRCOM model: The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba or IRCOM provides affordable housing to newcomers for a period of three years after arrival. What makes the model rather unique is that settlement support services, such as job searching and mental health support and after school programs are offered on site. Newcomers who live at IRCOM buildings enjoy holistic support. However, the number of units are limited and the demand is high (Bucklaschuk, 2016).

Temporary/Transitional shelter upon arrival: Recent newcomers from Ukraine who, upon arrival, stayed at government funded hotel rooms unanimously agreed that such temporary housing made the transition to a new life in Winnipeg much easier. It was mentioned by some participants that living in a hotel as a family is not very convenient, but the fact that they did have a ready place to stay at until they found a rental unit was very much helpful. Such an opportunity was not available to many refugees.

Newcomers not arriving as permanent residents, including those arriving under the Canada Ukraine Travel Authorization program do not receive child benefits for the first 18 months of their time in Canada. Some of the newcomer participants who do receive child benefits mentioned that they used the child benefit they received for their kids as a supplement to pay rent. Non permanent residents must either use their savings or get survival jobs as soon as possible in order to be able to pay their rent on time and in full.

Multi-Year Funding and more grants to community and service providing organizations will allow them to focus on what matters. Currently “organizations are spending too much time and resources on the administration of annual funding grants.”

Conclusion

This report has delved into the complexities facing newcomers looking to rent in Manitoba, with a particular focus on newcomers to Winnipeg. Identified issues range from the high costs of renting to the cumbersome application processes due to the fragmentation of affordable housing agencies, and the underutilization of pre-arrival orientation programs like SOPA.

Key recommendations emerging from the study include the establishment of a collaborative affordable housing registry, additional funding for service providing organizations such as NJH, and an expansive educational initiative targeted at both landlords and tenants. The latter should encompass not just rights and responsibilities, but also available channels for complaint and advocacy.

A unified approach to newcomer orientation is emphasized, and the reinstatement of the Entry Program has been suggested as a pivotal strategy. Further, increased accountability mechanisms for landlords and public funding are deemed essential for maintaining quality and ethical practices in the housing sector.

The long-term impacts of these changes could be significant, from reducing homelessness to better integrating newcomers into Manitoba's social fabric. However, it is generally agreed upon that the implementation of a comprehensive housing registry and other recommended solutions is a long-term commitment requiring multi-phase planning and execution.

For future work, considering how technology can further simplify housing processes will be beneficial. Effective change will require the concerted efforts of housing providers, governmental bodies, community organizations, and the residents of Manitoba themselves. Periodic assessment of the implemented recommendations is advisable for ongoing effectiveness.

The urgency for taking action is clear: failing to address these issues in a timely manner perpetuates systemic inefficiencies and inequities. Therefore, a concerted and timely effort from all stakeholders is imperative.

References

- 2021 Census of Population - Manitoba*. (2021, June 30). Retrieved from Statistics Canada:
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=9&dguid=2021A000246>
- 204 Filipino Forum. (2023). *204 Filipino Forum and Marketplace*. Retrieved from 204 Filipino Forum and Marketplace: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/204FilipinoMarketplace/discussion/preview>
- Bucklaschuk, J. (2016). *The IRCOM Model - Housing and Wrap-Around Supports for Newcomers in Winnipeg*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Manitoba.
- Canada Child Benefit*. (2023, July 15). Retrieved from Canada Revenue Agency:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/t4114/canada-child-benefit.html>
- Carter, T., Janzen, T., McCullough, S., Shirliffe, R., & Sinclair, E. (2020, January 16). *Comprehensive Housing Needs Assessment Report*. Retrieved from City of Winnipeg:
<https://legacy.winnipeg.ca/ppd/CityPlanning/Housing/ComprehensiveHousingNeedsAssessment.stm>
- CMHC. (2022). *Social and Affordable Housing Survey*. Winnipeg.
- CMHC. (2022). *Social and Affordable Housing Survey - Rental Structures*. Winnipeg: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
- CMHC. (2023). *Average rents for areas with a population of 10,000 and over*. Winnipeg: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.
- CMHC. (2023, September 04). *Identifying Core Housing Need*. Retrieved from CMHC: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-research/core-housing-need/identifying-core-housing-need>
- Dow, K. (2023, April 28). Rehabilitate or demolish? Manitoba Housing seeks proposals for vacant housing complex. *CTV News*, p. Online.
- Garang, R. (2021). *Integration and settlement: The experiences and expectations of African immigrants and refugees*. Winnipeg.
- Kives, B. (2022, May 30). Inner-city Winnipeg housing complex sits vacant, up for sale only 12 years after it was built. *CBC News*, p. Online.
- Manitoba*. (2023, July 20). Retrieved from Mapfight.xyz: <https://mapfight.xyz/map/manitoba/>
- Manitoba Immigration Facts Report*. (2020, June 20). Retrieved from Manitoba Immigration: <https://immigratemanitoba.com/data/facts-report-2020/>
- National Occupancy Standard*. (2023, August 20). Retrieved from CMHC: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable->

housing/provincial-territorial-agreements/investment-in-affordable-housing/national-occupancy-standard

Number of recent immigrants in Manitoba. (2023, June 20). Retrieved from Statista:
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/609175/number-of-immigrants-in-manitoba/>

Ottawa Housing Registry. (2023, June 12). Retrieved from Ottawa Housing Registry:
<https://housingregistry.ca/>

Quarterly Demographic Estimates. (2023, January 28). Retrieved from Manitoba Bureau of Statistics:
chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.gov.mb.ca/mbs/publications/mbs305_pop_bulletin_2023_m01.pdf

Rosen, K. (2022, March 31). Why one Winnipeg long-term care home is closing its doors. *CTV News*, p. Online. Retrieved from <https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/why-one-winnipeg-long-term-care-home-is-closing-its-doors-1.5842405>

Silvius, R., Halldorson, E., & Ataan Al-Ubeady, H. (2021). *Putting Home at the Heart of Refugee Resettlement*. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Winnipeg Census Profile. (2021, August 20). Retrieved from Statistics Canada:
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=winnipeg&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&DGUIDlist=2021A00054611040&HEADERlist=0>