



CCPA
 CANADIAN CENTRE
 for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
 MANITOBA OFFICE

RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • SOLUTIONS

FAST FACTS

January 18, 2012

Francophone Immigrants and the Housing Crisis in Winnipeg

Many obstacles confront newcomers in their efforts to integrate into Canadian society. Their search for employment is often frustrated by the failure to recognize their qualifications and education, and their lack of “Canadian” experience. Many immigrants arrive here with little knowledge of English. Finding adequate housing is also a challenge, especially given the large number of children in many newcomer families. Lack of access to suitable housing is perhaps the most daunting obstacle facing Manitoba’s francophone newcomers.

A research project conducted by the authors and funded by the Manitoba Research Alliance examined the specific housing concerns and circumstances of Winnipeg’s francophone newcomer community. The study considered the numerous studies demonstrating that access to decent, affordable housing is an important factor in the successful integration of newcomers into Canadian society. The housing crisis is severe in Winnipeg, with some 37% of tenant households facing core housing need, meaning they are paying more than 30% of their income on rent.

The study’s main goal was to examine the housing conditions of francophone newcomers in Winnipeg, its impact on their health, and their ideas of collective solutions to the housing crisis.

Some 85% of francophone newcomers now originate from Africa. These newcomers carry “triple” minority status, as immigrants, francophones and visible minorities, and their integration into Canadian society is hampered by discrimination.

Of the twelve families interviewed, seven were refugees from the Congo and Rwanda, and tended to have much larger families. The five other families were immigrants from Morocco, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Togo. Most refugees had been unemployed for over two years; those with jobs worked part-time or on call.

Participants’ housing experiences were varied. Most refugee families transited through government-funded housing facilities, such as Welcome Place, before finding their own housing. Immigrant families had to find their own accommodation upon arrival in Winnipeg. Most newcomers end up in inner-city neighbourhoods characterized by cheaper, run-down housing stock. One participant stated, “The window in the bedroom was broken and held together by scotch-tape...the heater in the children’s bedroom made a terrible racket... in the shower, there was a hole in the ceiling that leaked water from upstairs. The landlord promised to repair things, but hasn’t done anything”.



CCPA
 CANADIAN CENTRE
 for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
 MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
 Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
 T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
 ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
 www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.

FAST FACTS continued ...

Families complained of the many obstacles they faced from landlords, including racist attitudes: “I once called and then went to look at an apartment in Windsor Park. When I got there, they saw that I was black and they told me the apartment was no longer available”.

As many newcomers have large families, overcrowding in apartments was a common problem: “Having four girls share the same bedroom, they all catch the same cold at the same time...”

Most families reported health problems related to their housing conditions, including stress, insomnia, headaches and allergies. These problems are in addition to many pre-existing health concerns arising from war-related trauma. “You encounter stress everywhere. When you first arrive here, there’s culture shock. Then you face all sorts of barriers and obstacles. There’s the language barrier. If you don’t speak English well, you can’t find a decent job. Then there’s all the prejudice arising from the fact that you are a visible minority. Even if you are just as good as the next guy, you always have to prove yourself. The stress is never-ending”.

Living in sub-standard housing leads to a general feeling of stress and frustration, especially when such a large part of household income goes towards rent, making it necessary to cut the food budget to the point where children go to school hungry. A number of respondents complained of vermin, or inadequate heating and ventilation systems that contributed to problems like asthma. “There were mice everywhere, and they were a constant source of fatigue”.

Parents also spoke of the demoralizing effects of being unable to adequately support their children, due to the high cost of rent. “Being unable to offer things to your child that all his friends have is upsetting to him. He becomes like a caged lion, furious all the time”.

When asked how they thought their situation could improve, participants saw an important role for government. They saw it as responsible for the housing crisis, but also holding the capacity to solve it. They believed that their difficulties in finding decent, affordable housing represented a formidable obstacle to their successful integration into Canadian society. They spoke of government action that would include “a short and long term housing policy ... facilitating home ownership”, and also “building affordable housing... either housing cooperatives or low-cost housing”.

However, the Canadian government withdrew from the creation of social housing in 1993, contributing to the worsening of the housing crisis throughout the country. In fact, the Canadian government is the only G-8 country without a national housing strategy. The government’s attitude is in stark contrast to that of francophone newcomers from Africa, who come from cultures that value community and collective practices.

The participation of newcomers to movements fighting for social housing represents a source of hope for social change. With the increase in francophone immigration to Manitoba, new community resources and institutions have sprung up to help integrate these newcomers. However, civil society is incapable on its own to meet the challenge of finding decent, affordable housing for these newcomers. As with all low-income communities, comprehensive government programs must lead the way. The government is aggressively recruiting immigrants to settle in Manitoba; it is high time that it tackle the housing shortage head on so that these Manitobans can build decent lives.

David Alper, Halimatou Ba, and Mamadou Ka all teach at Université de Saint-Boniface, and Bintou Sacko is director of Accueil francophone du Manitoba, and they are co-authors of: Les immigrants face au logement à Winnipeg : Cas des nouveaux arrivants d’Afrique francophone.



CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

309 - 323 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 2C1
T 204.927.3200 F 204.927.3201
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

The *Fast Facts* are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.