

Refugee Claimants and Access to Permanent Housing in the City of Toronto

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Abstract

Toronto continues to be a major recipient of refugee claimants and understanding the complexities of their housing trajectories is critical in ensuring they successfully integrate into society. This Major Research Paper (MRP) sets out to expand current understanding about challenges refugee claimants face in their search for permanent housing in the City of Toronto and highlight the coping strategies they have developed to navigate around these barriers. In 2011, a research team led by York University urban social geographer Valerie Preston completed a comprehensive study that compared the housing experiences of different immigrant groups, including refugee claimants, as part of a larger Pan-Canadian study. This study set the foundation for my research, as I followed the same methodological path to determine if Preston's findings still hold value and what new trends have emerged. This paper provides a high-level overview of Toronto's Housing Market and provides background on the current state of refugee housing in the City of Toronto to illustrate the intricacies of the local context. In order to understand the barriers, qualitative research in the form of expert interviews was also conducted with service providers who offer settlement services to refugee claimants. A total of seven interviews were conducted, transcribed and analyzed to identify themes. Interviews with service providers revealed that the most significant barriers were housing market and Affordability, employment, Toronto-specific programs, and systematic gaps. Common coping mechanisms on the other hand, included sharing accommodation and moving beyond the GTHA. Comparisons are made throughout this paper between findings from the Preston study and my research findings.

Biography

Elaha Safi is a recent graduate from the Master of Planning in Urban Development program at Ryerson University. She completed her Honors Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, Criminology and Political Science at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include housing affordability, underserved populations and public engagement.