

Feedback and Recommendation to the Nova Scotia Affordable Housing Commission

**Submitted by Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and Halifax Refugee
Clinic**

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Executive Summary

Although it has recently been agreed across party lines in Nova Scotia that housing is a human right, there continues to be a crisis in the lack of affordable housing. Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) and Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) collaborated to produce this report, which aims to recognize and highlight the Commission's need to address this crisis. Recommendations to the Commission, property owners, developers, policy makers, and the community at large are proposed throughout this report, as well as summarized below. Moreover, this report demonstrates ISANS' and HRC's support for newcomers to be included in the discussions around housing. Not only do newcomers have a right to housing, they also offer a diverse and unique perspective on social and economic barriers and economic sustainability.

Immigration is vital to the province's growth and development, both economically and socially. In fact, the federal and provincial governments have increased immigration targets to reflect the need of newcomer contributions. Thus, it is essential to understand and value the benefits of increasing immigration and migration to Nova Scotia to ensure that newcomers too are adequately accommodated. It logically flows that as the province's population increases, the need for housing increases. However, unlike the Commission stating that increased migration is a major challenge to the housing crisis, we suggest that increased migration encourages innovation in the housing supply. As a province, we must continue to challenge ourselves to be more diverse and inclusive, and reflecting on the need for affordable housing is one way in which that can happen. In addition to recommending that the Commission's view on immigration adjust to a more positive lens, we caution the Commission that any direct or indirect suggestion that immigration poses a concern in our province could further increase the potential for discrimination and systemic barriers that these groups already face.

Immigrants, refugee claimants, and temporary resident and migrant individuals and families struggle to find and maintain safe, affordable, accessible, and appropriate housing due to low income, disproportionate discrimination, and systemic barriers. As a community, we must address these barriers and ensure successful newcomer integration by building a sense of belonging. As such, we cannot underestimate the significance of housing in building a sense of belonging – groups will naturally feel like they belong when they are surrounded by a neighborhood they can call their own.

The work that needs to be done does not solely rest on the Commission. The province's existing social policies contribute to the housing problem. Provincial income assistance allowances do not reflect the real costs of living or of housing, language barriers must be recognized and challenged, and there needs to be more opportunities for newcomers to collaborate and engage on housing initiatives and consultations. As organizations, we must work with our partners to address affordable housing, and as a community, we must work together to address the barriers newcomers face.

Summary of Recommendations

In exploring the issues around affordable housing, this report provides the following recommendations to the Commission:

Housing Supply

- Consider housing supply seriously and examine how related recommendations being put forward align with government priorities in regards to immigration, anti-racism and inclusion, and other relevant policy initiatives.

Emergency Shelters

- Provide emergency shelters with the resources needed to eliminate waitlists.
- Update shelter policies and guidelines to include diverse populations who need to access their services regardless of immigration status and to meet the needs of the whole family.
- Provide interpretation services at the shelters and at related service agencies.

Temporary Housing

- Establish transitional temporary housing options for newcomers to prepare them to move into permanent housing solutions in the community.

Permanent Housing

- Develop an inclusive housing strategy that engages immigrants, refugee claimants, and housing developers, in the design consultations of future housing and community developments.
- Deepen the conversation about affordable housing options and solutions, as different groups of people define the term from their own unique perspective.
- Conduct more research and consultations to broaden understanding of the diverse housing experience and needs of immigrants, refugees, and refugee claimants in urban and rural areas of the province.
- Review best practices across Canada and analyze these best practices among property owners and property managers for affordable, safe, and quality apartment/housing living **options** for the Nova Scotian context.
- Elaborate policies on property development that state that a certain percentage of space be used for affordable housing. The policies should encourage mixed housing developments that cater to a range of housing needs and incomes.
- Expand Co-op housing options and similar initiatives and provide better pathways for home ownership.
- Include people making refugee claims and people without status in eligibility for governmental rental supplements and public housing, and all housing initiatives moving forward.

Partners and Governance

- Adjust provincial Income Assistance housing allowances for all, to reflect real housing costs and the size and composition of the family.
- Expand the eligibility criteria for social services to include refugee claimants and other temporary residents who are in need.
- Include immigrant, refugee claimant, temporary resident and migrant representatives, and those who serve them in consultations and planning around affordable housing.

Racism and Discrimination

- Look at ways to better enforce the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act, especially in relation to housing applications and tenant-landlord relationships.
- Review and amend NS Housing policies to eliminate discrimination based on immigration status for subsidized housing.

Introduction

ISANS and HRC work to ensure that members of our community who are immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants are considered in the provincial government discussions on housing, as they all face challenges in this matter.

The following feedback and recommendations respond to the commission's vision: sustainable, affordable, and inclusive rental housing for Nova Scotians in housing need, and its three focus areas:

- Housing Supply
- People and Community
- Partners and Governance

as they relate to the experiences of immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants in relation to affordable housing.

Background on Immigration



Definition of Terms

There are many terms that are used and confused when discussing international migrants.

For the purposes of this document, we will use the following terms with these definitions:

Permanent Resident OR Immigrant –has permanent resident status in Canada, includes Government – Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees

Refugee Claimant (or asylum seeker)

- Fled their country and asking for protection in another country
- Undergo a lengthy refugee determination process in Canada and are legally entitled to remain in Canada during this process

Temporary Resident

- **Temporary Worker** –is in Canada on a temporary work permit
- **International Student** – is in Canada on a temporary study permit

Migrant

- For the purposes of this document, migrants includes other categories not listed above such as people with no status, people pursuing regularization of their status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, people undergoing pre-removal risk assessments, and others

Increasing immigration to Nova Scotia is essential for the province’s continued population growth and economic sustainability, as well as to our development as a diverse, inclusive and innovative community. This is backed up by the provincial government in Premier Iain Rankin’s mandate letter to the Minister of Immigration and Population Growth, 2021 where he states:

“In my first address as Premier, I spoke to Nova Scotia’s success not just in attracting newcomers to the province, but also in making them feel welcome. In adding Population Growth to the name of the Office of Immigration, I am reinforcing that retention, interprovincial migration, and international immigration leading to a growing population are essential to the future of our province.” Iain Rankin Mandate Letter to Minister of Immigration, Hon. Lena Metlege Diab, February 2021

https://novascotia.ca/exec_council/PDF/letters/2021MinLAE.pdf

Immigration to Nova Scotia has been increasing steadily for the past several years

Permanent Residents

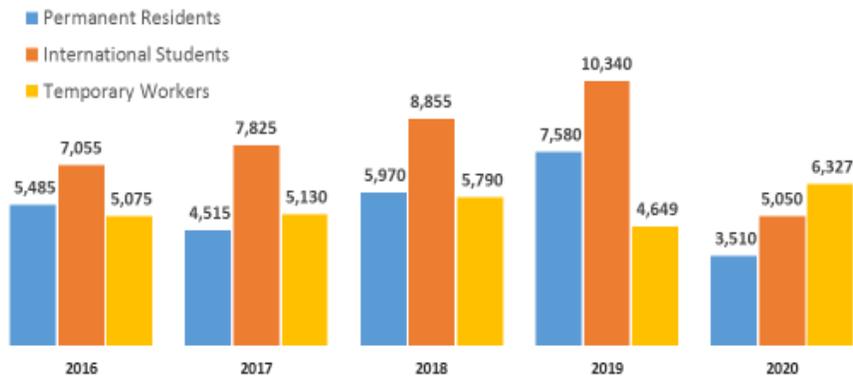
- 7,545 people obtained permanent resident status in Nova Scotia in 2019
- “Immigrants to Nova Scotia are most likely to settle in Halifax, with 82 per cent of immigrants in 2019/2020 landing in the city. Cape Breton, Antigonish, Colchester, Kings and Lunenburg counties receive the next highest number of immigrants in 2019/2020. Most other counties receive a smaller number of immigrants each year.” [One NS website]

Many more temporary residents are also arriving each year

Temporary residents are considered ideal potential immigrants, as they have already lived in Nova Scotia and are contributing to our communities.

- **International Students** - “A growing number of potential economic migrants are being attracted to study at Nova Scotia’s post-secondary institutions. More of them are also choosing to stay and build a life here. This is an opportunity to help combat the province’s [demographic](#) and economic challenges. As the number of [enrolments](#) rise, retention efforts can expand to accommodate the larger volume of potential economic migrants.” [One NS website]
- **Temporary Workers** are located across the province, filling many critical positions in our labour market and more of them are needed, especially in entry-level positions for long-term care, truck driving, early childhood education, resource-based industries such as fish processing and the trades.

Nova Scotia Residents (2016-2020)



ISANS and HRC

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

ISANS' vision is "A Community Where All Can Belong and Grow" and our mission is "Helping Immigrants Build a Future in Nova Scotia". ISANS is the leading deliverer of settlement services in Atlantic Canada and provides the full range of programs and services to 9,000+ immigrant clients annually in 101 communities across Nova Scotia.

Working with numerous partners, ISANS serves clients with a clear focus on the goal of social and economic integration. Programs and services range from refugee resettlement to business counselling, from literacy-level English language training to integrated language and pre-employment programs for specific professions.

Over the last 41 years, ISANS has helped to settle countless immigrants including 10,000+ refugees from 40 different countries. During the newcomers' first year in Canada, ISANS supports them in finding their first apartment, providing orientation and support with budgeting, shopping and accessing federal, provincial and community programs and services. Through this work, ISANS has gained a good understanding of the challenges newcomers face in securing safe and affordable housing and the factors that increase their risks of homelessness.

Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC)

HRC started in the year 2000 as a response to the lack of government funded legal aid for people making refugee claims in Nova Scotia. The HRC is a not-for-profit organization that provides free legal and

settlement services to refugee claimants, as well as other humanitarian and risk-based immigration applicants, in our communities. The HRC has had a 200% increase in clients since 2018 and currently services over 230 diverse residents of Nova Scotia with the aim to support them to live here safely and have the opportunity to thrive. Over 90% of HRC clients eventually receive permanent residence status (after years of immigration processes). The HRC provides housing support services daily and bears witness to the challenges clients face in accessing safe and affordable housing.

Housing as a Human Right

It is important to emphasize that housing is a human right and that we must continually advance and protect the rights of all people in our communities and province. Recently, agreement was made across party lines in Nova Scotia that housing is a human right. ISANS and HRC recognize that not only do newcomers have a **need** for adequate housing, but that this is also their **right**. They are members and residents of our communities, whether or not they have regularized their immigration status and received permanent residence.

In June 2019, Canada passed Bill C-97, which contained the “National Housing Strategy Act”.

One of the first lines in the legislation reads as follows: “It is declared to be the housing policy of the Government of Canada to recognize that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law; and to recognize that housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities.”

A 2017 CBC article titled *Trudeau says housing is a human right — what does that mean exactly?* explains that “...the right to adequate housing covers measures that are needed to prevent homelessness, prohibit forced evictions, address discrimination, focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensure security of tenure to all, and guarantee that everyone's housing is adequate.”

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-housing-rights-human-rights-1.4414854>)

The understanding that housing is a human right compels us to ensure that all people are included in Nova Scotia's housing policies and that protected grounds such as national origin and place of origin are not violated through exclusionary policies or practices (such as excluding refugee claimants from rental subsidies and public housing).

(<https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/news/provincial/ndp-introduces-bill-that-would-recognize-housing-as-a-human-right-in-ns-567956/>)

Housing as a Social Determinant of Health

Using a social determinant of health lens requires the commission to look at housing issues from an equity, diversity and inclusion perspective and the intersecting factors of people's lives and circumstances. For immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants, immigration status and settlement are additional factors affecting their health, wellbeing and housing outcomes.

Lauren Taylor in her article *Housing and Health: An Overview of the literature* <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20180313.396577/full/> states that: “There is strong evidence characterizing housing’s relationship to health. Housing stability, quality, safety, and affordability all affect health outcomes, as do physical and social characteristics of neighborhoods. The impact of housing on health is now being widely considered by policy makers. Housing is one of the best-researched social determinants of health, and selected housing interventions for low-income people have been found to improve health outcomes and decrease health care costs. As a result, many health care systems, payers, and government entities are seeking to better understand the totality of the health and housing literature to determine where they might intervene effectively. This brief outlines the literature and provides high-level direction for future research and policy agendas.”

ISANS and HRC believe in and support safe, accessible, affordable and appropriate housing for all and see the correlation between housing and newcomers’ health outcomes.

Feedback on Nova Scotia’s Affordable Housing Commission’s Priorities and Identified Themes



Housing Supply

The commission has listed “Increased Migration” as the first major point under Challenges, indicating that increased migration put undue pressure on housing supply in the province. We believe this is a problematic statement for the Commission to make for the following reasons:

1. The statement implies that migrants are a major cause of Nova Scotia’s housing shortage. It is unclear who migrants are when referred to as such.
 - Is the Commission referring to international migrants or also to people moving from other provinces, including Nova Scotians moving back home?
 - If the statement means international migrants, is the Commission referring to temporary residents, permanent residents or all international newcomers?
2. If the statement is referring to international migrants, it is concerning on two levels:
 1. The federal, provincial, and municipal governments regard immigration and migration as key contributors to the enrichment of our economy, filling employment and skill shortage, and support the creation of diverse and inclusive communities. To reach these goals, both the federal and provincial governments have increased immigration targets and expanded immigration pathways. Recently, the federal minister of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship of Canada made further commitment to increase future targets and expand pathways to immigration, including for temporary residents. The Nova Scotia government has supported these goals by increasing targets and expanding immigration pathway options to the province.

In order to meet these goals, Nova Scotia will require multi-prong retention efforts to ensure that newcomers feel welcomed and included in the province. Diverse, inclusive and affordable housing options is one of these factors. The challenge is more accurately described, as the province is currently unable to support the requirements of increased immigration including offering adequate housing options to meet the demand.

2. By indicating that Increased Migration is a key challenge, the Commission targets a population that already faces many systemic barriers and forms of oppression and discrimination. Naming them as a key factor may further strengthen stereotypes and negative attitudes of “people from away”, at a period in time when there is heightened awareness of the negative consequences of such attitudes and increased positive actions to address these barriers at all levels.

Recommendation:

That the Commission consider the concerns addressed above and examine how related recommendations being put forward align with government priorities in regards to immigration, anti-racism and inclusion, and other relevant policy initiatives.

People and Communities



Systemic Barriers – preventing housing access to vulnerable groups:

While this Commission focuses on affordable housing, in order to understand immigrant, refugee claimant and temporary resident housing contexts, we need to understand the experiences related to housing options on a continuum, as presented by CMHC (<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/blog/2019-housing-observer/wheelhouse-new-way-looking-housing-needs>).



To understand systemic barriers for immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants, we also need to take an intersectional perspective, as individuals and families within these populations are very diverse, with unique identities and experiences.

There is a unique continuum of housing needs for international newcomers to the province and appropriate housing is an important element in supporting the retention of all newcomers.

Immigrants who arrive as Refugees begin their lives in Canada with limited incomes at the level of social assistance. Many have large families and struggle to find adequate sizes of housing units. They often enter the job market at an entry-level position.

International Students pay tuition fees that are 3-4 times higher than those of Canadian citizens. They struggle to find affordable housing that is close to their place of study.

Temporary Workers are more likely to be employed in entry-level jobs and to earn lower wages. They face the same issues as other Nova Scotians who are managing on limited incomes. In addition, many of them send a considerable portion of their wages to their family members who were unable to accompany them. Over 50% of temporary workers live outside HRM.

Economic category immigrants often begin their employment at entry positions or positions they are overqualified for, and may face challenges in securing housing that is affordable during their initial settlement and integration period. Economic immigrants often do not have jobs at time of arrival, and securing housing at this point can be very challenging, as they do not have an established credit history and are seeking employment.

People making refugee claims and people without status are currently ineligible for rental supplements and Public Housing, making it almost impossible to find housing. Refugee claimants are eligible for provincial income assistance but the lack of eligibility for rental subsidies results in lengthy urgent shelter stays (including hotel accommodations funded by the Province).

In relation to emergency shelter, temporary housing, permanent housing, social integration and recreation, we would like to raise the following issues and recommendations:

Emergency Shelters

Immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants very seldom use emergency shelters, as the shelters are not set up to address the housing needs of newcomers:

- **Waiting lists** to access local shelters for women who are experiencing domestic violence are already extensive
- **Interpretation** and other accommodations are often not offered by the shelter across the province. This is often overlooked as eligible costs in funding proposals, making it very challenging community organizations to meet interpretation needs;

- **Local shelters for women only** take male children up to 16 years old. This makes it difficult for women with children to find a shelter where they can all stay. There are no shelters for whole families;
- **At the local men’s shelter**, men must leave the shelter during the day and go to other locations for food and other supports. Men’s shelters are often full and finding a space is determined on a first come first in basis. This is very difficult for a newcomer who does not know the city or the language;
- **Men and women using the emergency shelters** tend to deal with issues such as addiction, mental health and criminology, which are often very different from the reasons why newcomer men, women and families are in need of emergency shelter;
- **Families and individuals leaving domestic violence** or dealing with other urgent issues impacting their housing situation, face critical situations when affordable and safe housing cannot be secured in a timely manner; and/or
- **Refugee claimants** experience all the above barriers and may also experience challenges being eligible for shelter services due to confusion over their immigration status.

Recommendations:

- Provide emergency shelters with the resources needed to eliminate waitlists.
- Update shelter policies and guidelines to include diverse populations who need to access their services regardless of immigration status and to meet the needs of the whole family.
- Provide interpretation services at the shelters and at related service agencies.

Temporary Housing

As with the wider community, newcomers have various needs for entering into long-term housing.

- Many provinces have temporary housing/reception housing that serves as temporary accommodations for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). On site, they have settlement and housing related support services that would address their initial needs during their first 3-4 weeks. After this time, GARs often find it difficult to access affordable housing options.
- Other newcomer populations including refugee claimants also face temporary housing challenges. There is an acute need for transitional temporary housing (6 months -3 years) to assist in transitioning to stable and long-term housing, especially for those who have more complex housing needs.

Recommendation:

Establish transitional temporary housing options for newcomers to prepare them to move into permanent housing solutions in the community.



Permanent Housing

Immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrant individuals and families struggle to find safe, affordable, accessible and appropriate housing that meet their needs. Affordability is defined differently for different newcomer groups. Some are trying to find housing based on Income Assistance shelter rates, while others are working poor, living pay-cheque to pay-cheque, and still, others are trying to find suitable housing for a large family.

Affordable

- Rent is no longer 'affordable' and many newcomers face major challenges with these increases across Nova Scotia. Public Housing has a long waiting list, in particular in areas of the city that are viewed as more safe and have larger units. Wait time ranges from 2 to 3+ years. Public housing units are not able to accommodate people with a range of physical disabilities.
- More property owners have joined Public Housing's program that offers a housing subsidy, which allows tenants to remain in their current apartment. This is good for those tenants who are properly housed, but more apartments and townhouse options need to be added to this program.
- Few apartments are both affordable and accessible. This creates serious challenges for disabled individuals and their families.
- People making refugee claims and people without status are currently ineligible for rental supplements and Public Housing. This policy further marginalizes vulnerable refugee claimants and others, and potentially costs the province more in emergency housing. For example, refugee claimants are frequently funded by DCS to stay in hotels when the shelters are full or if a family needs emergency shelter. The HRC has seen clients stay in hotels for many months (up to 6 months in one case) because they are unable to find housing (even with the support of our housing worker) due to many challenges, most notably ineligibility for rental supplements and public housing.

Appropriate and Accessible

- International newcomer families are often large and require 3+ bedroom apartments. They often have to settle for unsafe housing and are being under-housed.
- Newcomer families value accessible and affordable inter-generational shared living space, where their elders can age in place. Adult children may live at home until marriage. Current housing stock forces families to live apart.
- Some vulnerable immigrants require housing support in order to build capacity to maintain safe and affordable housing.
- Generally, temporary workers have been located across the province, with as many as half of them being outside HRM. Those outside the city may experience feelings of isolation.
- Many newcomers' goal is to own a home. They need more support to realize this goal – especially in terms of accessing information and enrolling in special housing initiatives for first time buyers.
- There is a lack of data on the experience and perspectives of immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants seeking housing in Canada and especially in Nova Scotia. We need data on the experiences in urban and rural areas and across immigration status and other

social determinants of health factors. We also know little about what approach and housing options could address their housing needs, and in particular the needs and circumstances of those who are most vulnerable.



Recommendations:

- **Develop an inclusive housing strategy** that engages immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents, migrants and housing developers in the design consultations of future housing and community developments.
- **Deepen the conversation about affordable housing options** and solutions, as different groups of people define the term from their own unique perspective.
- **Conduct more research and consultations** to broaden understanding of the diverse housing experience and needs of immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants in urban and rural areas of the province.
- **Review best practices across Canada** and analyze these best practices among property owners and property managers for affordable, safe, and quality apartment/housing living options for the Nova Scotian context.
- **Elaborate policies on property development** that state that a certain percentage of space be used for affordable housing. The policies should encourage mixed housing developments that cater to a range of housing needs and incomes.
- **Expand Co-op housing options** and similar initiatives and provide better pathways for home ownership.

- **Include people making refugee claims and people without status in eligibility** for governmental rental supplements and public housing, and all housing initiatives moving forward.

Social Integration and Recreation

Successful integration of newcomers requires building a sense of community. In Canada, there is a more structured approach to family life that is geared towards people using their car to get around. Parents drive their children to structured, paid activities. If families do not have a vehicle or money for public transportation, and for recreational activities, it is difficult for them to access these activities.

Cultural considerations

Many newcomers to Canada come from collectivist cultures, where daily life and recreation is shared with extended family and neighbors.

- Newcomers tend to move to areas where other people from their ethno-cultural communities live. They rely on each other for supports including child minding. They try to create communities of supports and live with people around them that understand their culture and language. People tend to settle better if they live within a community that supports them.
- Newcomer families often stay more within their apartment complexes, gather outdoors and share in supervising their children.

Affordable apartment complexes, generally:

- are not located within walking distances to community and recreation centers.
- do not accommodate a common space where tenants can sit and socialize and children can play safely.
- do not accommodate families spending time outdoors – there are few seating and safe gathering areas beside a playground.

The challenges in finding and maintaining safe and affordable housing are very hard mentally and physically on all family members.

Recommendations:

Landlords

- Develop cultural understanding and communication strategies to be able to effectively and respectfully communicate with all tenants.

Developers

- Consult with immigrant, refugee claimant, temporary resident and migrant communities.
- Include communal spaces.
- Build complexes that better accommodate children's need for play with offering more play spaces and common areas.

- Include easy access to shopping, public transportation, and inclusive recreation activities and green spaces.

Communities

- Explore ways to build welcoming communities for diverse populations.

Policy Makers

- Encourage quality of life for all family compositions and circumstances.
- Prioritize engaging various populations in consultations and activities in order to build inclusive and welcoming communities.



Partners and Governance

In this section, we will highlight issues related to social policies, lack of collaboration, and systemic discrimination and racism.

Social Policies

Existing social policies are part of the root causes and risks of housing problems.

Funding

- Provincial income assistance allowances do not reflect the real costs of housing. This is an issue for all low-income Nova Scotians.
- The federal Resettlement Assistance Program rates for Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) mirror the provincial income assistance rates. These rates cause serious challenges in securing affordable and appropriate housing for GAR families. This is a special challenge for single people and for large families.

Special considerations

- Refugee claimants are excluded from many community programs due to their immigration status.
- Immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants who are single or youth need additional supports to help them in building capacity to live well independently.
- There are many communication challenges for newcomers in accessing and maintaining housing. Applications and information about housing options and issues are not in plain language or translated into key immigrant languages. This raises barriers to information and to access to housing.

Collaboration

- There needs to be more opportunities for immigrant and refugee claimant serving agencies to collaborate and engage on housing initiatives and consultations.

- There are no immigrant, refugee claimant, temporary resident and migrant voices represented in discussions on affordable, permanent housing. An inclusive approach needs to be created where their perspectives and experiences are represented in order to create housing solutions that reflect the diversity of our communities.

Recommendations:

- Adjust provincial Income Assistance housing allowances for all, to reflect real housing costs and the size and composition of the family.
- Expand the eligibility criteria for social services to include refugee claimants and other temporary residents who are in need.
- Include immigrant, refugee claimant, temporary resident and migrant representatives, and those who serve them in consultations and planning around affordable housing.

Racism and Discrimination

Immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants experience disproportionate discrimination when looking for housing.

Protected characteristics under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act such as race, religion, national origin, place of origin, age, family composition, marital status, sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, physical or mental disability, and source of income are used as reasons for rejecting an apartment or housing application. For example: Clients of the HRC have had and continue to have their human rights violated when applying for housing. Reasons provided by various property owners and property management companies include the following: “We don’t rent to Africans”; “We don’t rent to *those people*”; “We don’t rent to families”; “We don’t allow children in the building”; “We don’t rent to people on income assistance”.

Immigrants, refugee claimants, temporary residents and migrants can face racism and discrimination when applying for housing such as rejection of applications or the use of short fixed-term leases. Short fixed term leases end the lease automatically and have to be renewed to continue. This practice leaves newcomers vulnerable to homelessness.

Refugee claimants do not have access to subsidized housing options such as rental supplements and Public Housing.

Recommendations:

- Look at ways to better enforce the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act, especially in relation to housing applications and tenant-landlord relationships.
- Review and amend NS Housing policies to eliminate discrimination based on immigration status for subsidized housing.

Concluding Statement

International newcomers are integral to the future of our province. Creating safe, accessible, affordable housing is a key strategy in welcoming and retaining newcomers in our province.

According to the recent report by the Royal Society of Canada, “Newly arrived and lower income immigrants and refugees, who are just starting their settlement process, and the agencies helping them, face significant challenges in securing stable and adequate housing, regardless of where they reside/operate in Canada.” [Supporting Canada’s COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery Through Robust Immigration Policy and Programs, Royal Society of Canada, March 2021]

Other reports written by organizations across the country highlight and stress the importance of the recommendations provided in this report. They also emphasize changing the use of government surplus land to target affordable housing, using inclusionary zoning and density bonusing tools, and offering low-income housing tax credits to make affordable housing appealing to property owners.

Solutions to our affordable housing crisis need take into account the diverse and complex housing needs of all residents of Nova Scotia and the related social determinants of health factors and human rights issues. Affordable housing is integral to Nova Scotia’s ability to creating a community where all can belong and grow.

References

- Iain Rankin Mandate Letter to Minister of Immigration, Hon. Lena Metlege Diab, February 2021
- ISANS – National Housing Strategy Consultation Report, October 2016
- Supporting Canada’s COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery Through Robust Immigration Policy and Programs, Royal Society of Canada, March 2021
- The Wheelhouse: A New Way of Looking at Housing Needs, CMHC, August 2019