

Invisible Journeys:

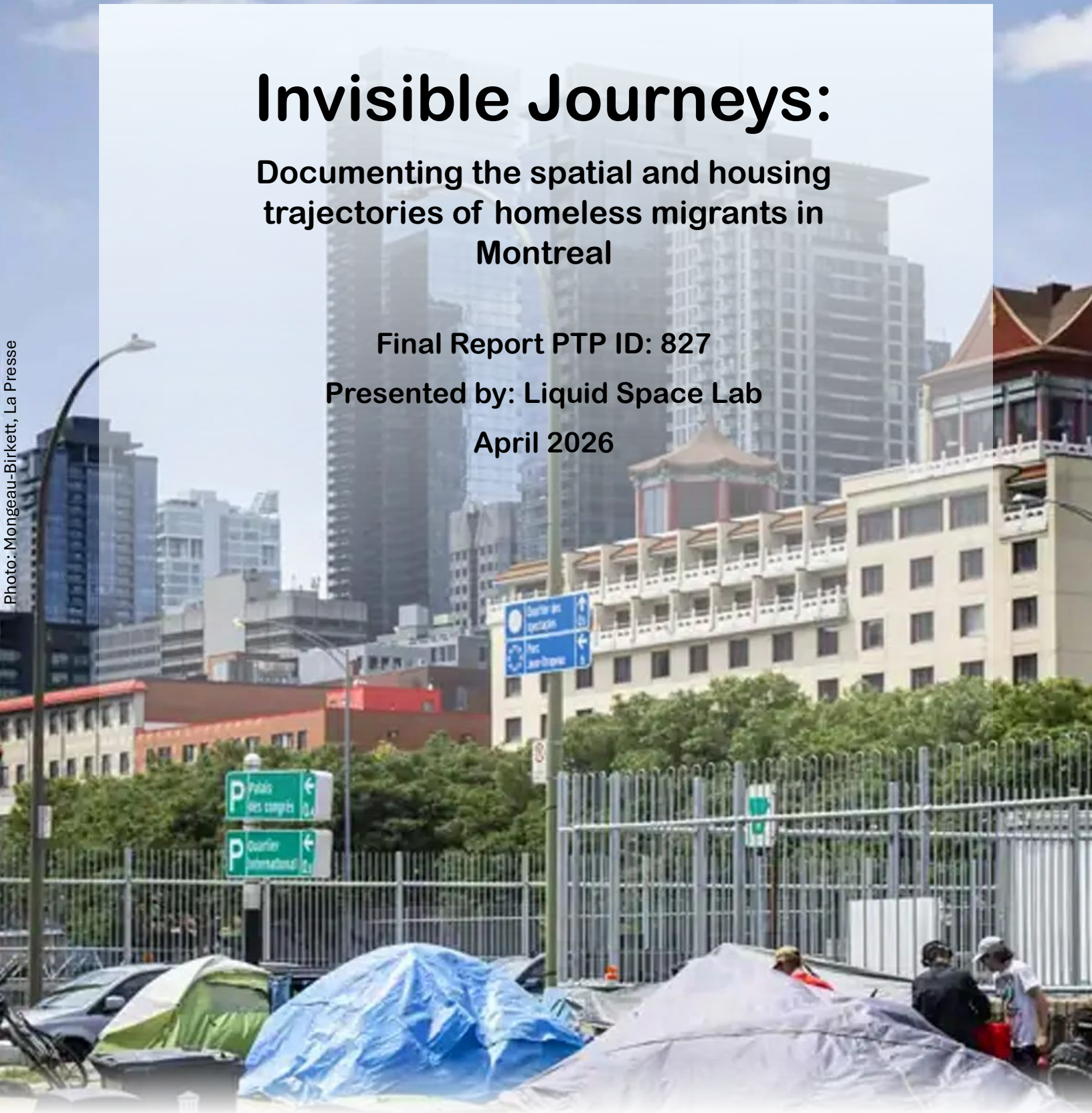
Documenting the spatial and housing
trajectories of homeless migrants in
Montreal

Final Report PTP ID: 827

Presented by: Liquid Space Lab

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Photo: Mongeau-Birkett, La Presse



This study/research was led by

Liquid Space Lab

and received funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) under the National Housing Strategy (NHS) Research and Planning Fund. The views, analysis, interpretations and recommendations expressed in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of CMHC. CMHC's financial contribution to this report does not constitute an endorsement of its contents.

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et a reçu du financement de la Société canadienne d'hypothèques et de logement (SCHL) dans le cadre du Fonds de recherche et de planification de la Stratégie nationale sur le logement (SNL). Les opinions, analyses, interprétations et recommandations présentées dans cette étude sont celles du ou des auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement le point de vue de la SCHL. La contribution financière de la SCHL à la publication de ce rapport ne constitue nullement une approbation de son contenu.

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Invisible Journeys:
Documenting the Spatial and Housing Trajectories of Homeless Migrants in Montreal
Final Report PTP ID: 827



Research and Planning Fund
National Housing Strategy

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Lead Organization

Liquid Space Lab

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Architecture Sans Frontières Québec
Chaire Fayolle-Magil Construction – Université de Montréal
Collectif Bienvenue / Welcome Collective
ROHMI – Regroupement des organismes en hébergement pour les
personnes migrantes
CQPI - Collectif québécois pour la prévention de l'itinérance

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2026

Disclaimer

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We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Art Campbell (CQPI), Gonzalo Lizarralde (Université de Montréal, Chaire Fayolle-Magil Construction), Florence Bourdeau (ROHMI), and Julia Tishler (Architecture Sans Frontières Québec – ASFQ) for their guidance, insights, and continued support.

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We also wish to recognize the broader ecosystem of organizations and institutions working on homelessness and migrant support in Montreal, including shelters, community organizations, outreach services, and public agencies. These actors play a critical role in providing essential services, facilitating access to resources, and supporting migrants as they navigate complex and often fragmented systems. Their perspectives and collaboration were fundamental in shaping the analysis and recommendations of this study.

Above all, we express our deepest gratitude to the migrants who agreed to participate in this research. Their willingness to share personal experiences, trajectories, and reflections, often under difficult circumstances, made this work possible. We were continually struck by their courage, resilience, and determination to overcome not only the challenges that led them to leave their countries of origin, but also the complex barriers they face upon arrival in Canada. Their voices are at the core of this project and remain its most important contribution.

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Nous souhaitons également reconnaître l'ensemble des organisations et des institutions œuvrant dans les domaines de l'itinérance et du soutien aux personnes migrantes à Montréal, y compris les refuges, les organismes communautaires, les services de proximité et les agences publiques. Ces acteurs jouent un rôle crucial en fournissant des services essentiels, en facilitant l'accès aux ressources et en accompagnant les personnes migrantes dans des systèmes complexes et souvent fragmentés. Leurs perspectives et leur collaboration ont été fondamentales pour l'élaboration de l'analyse et des recommandations de cette étude.

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También queremos reconocer el ecosistema más amplio de organizaciones e instituciones que trabajan en temas de personas sin vivienda y apoyo a personas migrantes en Montreal, incluyendo refugios, organizaciones comunitarias, servicios de alcance y entidades públicas. Estos actores desempeñan un papel fundamental en la provisión de servicios esenciales, facilitando el acceso a recursos y apoyando a los migrantes en la navegación de sistemas complejos y, en muchos casos, fragmentados.

تقدير و شكر

الاستراتيجية إطار في (SCHL) والإسكان العقاري للرهن الكندية المؤسسة من المالي الدعم بفضل المشروع هذا أنجز المشروع مدة طوال والتزامها دعمها على SCHL ال من فلتعوس إليزابيث إلى الشكر بخالص نتقدم أن نودّ للإسكان الوطنية

ونودّ أن نعرب عن بالغ امتناننا لكلّ من آرت كامبل (CQPI)، غونزالو ليزارالدي (جامعة مونتريال، فايول-ماجيل للبناء)، فلورنس بورديو (ROHMI)، وجوليا تيشلر (الهندسة المعمارية بلا حدود – كيبك ASFQ) على توجيهاتهم ورؤاهم ودعمهم المستمر.

كما نخصّ بالشكر الجزيل دينا سليمان وفلافيا ليفا من منظمة Welcome Collective، إذ كان لالتزامهما وكرمهما وانخراطهما اليومي مع المهاجرين دور أساسي في ترسيخ هذا البحث في الواقع المعيش.

ونودّ أيضًا أن نُشيد بمختلف المنظمات والمؤسسات العاملة في مجالي التشرّد ودعم المهاجرين في مونتريال، بما في ذلك الملاجئ، والمنظمات المجتمعية، والهيئات العامة. إذ تُؤدّي هذه الجهات دورًا محوريًا في تقديم الخدمات الأساسية، وتسهيل الوصول إلى الموارد، ومرافقة المهاجرين في أنظمة معقّدة. وقد كانت وجهات نظرهم وتعاونهم أساسية في صياغة تحليل هذه الدراسة وتوصياتها.

وفوق كلّ ذلك، تُعبّر عن عميق امتناننا للمهاجرين الذين وافقوا على المشاركة في هذا البحث. فقد أتاح استعدادهم لمشاركة تجاربهم الشخصية ومساراتهم وتأمّلاتهم، وغالبًا في ظروف صعبة، إنجاز هذا العمل. وقد تأثّرنا كثيرًا بشجاعتهم وصمودهم وإصرارهم على تجاوز ليس فقط التحديات التي دفعتهم إلى مغادرة بلدانهم الأصلية، بل أيضًا العقبات المعقّدة التي يواجهونها عند وصولهم إلى كندا. إن أصواتهم هي في صميم هذا المشروع وتمثّل إسهامه الأهم.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	8
SOMMAIRE EXÉCUTIF.....	12
1. INTRODUCTION	16
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF HOMELESSNESS AND MIGRATION.....	20
3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	36
4. METHODS	39
5. RESULTS	43
6. DISCUSSION AND IMPACT.....	56
7. RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
8. CONCLUSIONS	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY	72
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW GUIDES	77
APPENDIX B. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	81
APPENDIX C. GLOSSARY	126

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migrant¹ homelessness has emerged as a growing yet insufficiently documented and understood phenomenon in Canadian cities. While extensive research exists on homelessness and immigrant integration separately, the intersection of migration and homelessness remains comparatively understudied. This report addresses some important gaps by examining the drivers, trajectories, geographies and support systems shaping migrant homelessness in Montreal, with the objective of informing policy development and program design.

The study builds on a prior literature review that confirmed the limited empirical knowledge available on migrant homelessness and highlighted the lack of institutions specifically mandated to address housing instability among migrant populations as a primary objective. In practice, homelessness services have adapted to respond to the needs of migrants, while immigrant-serving organizations have progressively incorporated housing assistance alongside their core settlement supports. The report therefore presents findings derived from fieldwork conducted to complement this limited evidence base and provide grounded insights for analysis and recommendations.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The research focused on four core questions: what drives migrants into homelessness and how their spatial trajectories unfold? What formal and informal resources migrants mobilize? How existing housing support systems, including temporary accommodation, facilitate or hinder access to stable housing? How migrant homelessness differs from domestic homelessness?

After document and available reports' review and analysis as well as a review of statistics, fieldwork consisted primarily of interviews with representatives from governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as interviews and focus groups with migrants experiencing homelessness where possible. In total, 13 experts and 22 homeless migrants participated to the study. Although direct access to this population proved more difficult than anticipated, the interviews and focus groups generated substantial insights into the dynamics of migrant homelessness in Montreal.

Key findings

The findings indicate that migrant homelessness in Montreal is best understood not as the outcome of individual crises but as a condition produced through system-level mismatches, structural injustice, and time lags between immigration processes, housing markets, and support services. Structural, institutional, and policy-related factors—including rising housing costs, administrative barriers, legal precarity, racial exclusion, and rental-market exclusion—combine to generate prolonged exposure to housing instability.

Rather than emerging from a single rupture, migrant trajectories are frequently characterized by non-anchoring at arrival and cumulative exposure to risk. Waiting periods, documentation gaps, unstable addresses, and precarious employment progressively layer vulnerability, suggesting that prevention must occur earlier than traditionally assumed.

A recurring mechanism is the temporal mismatch between administrative timelines and the urgency of the housing market. Time-limited reception programs often presume rapid transitions into private housing, yet migrants are frequently required to exit temporary arrangements before viable options exist.

¹ We adopted the term “migrant” because it is the term used by our research partners. As explained in the introduction section, migrants in this document refers to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary workers, international students or irregular settlers who are characterized with a poor social and economic capital and who are in Montreal since less than two years.

The research further identifies routing failures within fragmented institutional systems. Access to stable housing depends heavily on early connection to appropriate services, social networks, accurate information, and effective referrals. When these conditions are absent, migrants are more likely to cycle through temporary accommodations and informal arrangements. They rely on already strained homelessness services that adapted to meet the needs of migrant populations and immigrant serving populations that have expanded their mandates to include housing assistance alongside other settlement services.

Housing precarity is also produced within the private rental market through exclusionary filters such as credit history requirements, guarantors, documentation constraints, and discrimination. These barriers push migrants toward overcrowded, informal, or exploitative housing conditions that often remain statistically invisible.

Their spatial trajectories and use of the public space in the city are generally limited. Their household composition—often includes family members rather than single individuals—limits how they can use space compared to locally homeless individuals whose homelessness is often more visible.

Although governmental, community-based, and informal supports help prevent immediate street homelessness, they frequently operate as a temporary system that sustains prolonged precarity rather than enabling durable exits. Promising practices—particularly programs that mediate relationships with landlords and support the creation of rental histories—demonstrate the potential for more stabilizing pathways but remain limited in scale.

Finally, migrant homelessness differs significantly from domestic homelessness in its causes, trajectories, and visibility. It is predominantly hidden, shaped by administrative exclusion and structural barriers, and often involves families and women navigating layered risks related to safety, dependency, and social isolation.

Key Recommendations

Implications for Policy and Programming

The findings suggest that migrant homelessness is shaped by an institutional system that produce and sustain precarious living conditions. Addressing the issue requires moving beyond short-term accommodation toward structural responses that expand access to housing, employment, and services for migrants while reducing administrative barriers. Without such changes, temporary support systems risk reproducing instability rather than resolving it, leaving many migrants trapped in cycles of hidden and persistent homelessness.

Addressing migrant homelessness requires shifting from emergency containment toward system-level interventions that prioritize continuity, stabilization, and early prevention.

1. Strengthen entry points and referrals to prevent gaps in service.

Develop cross-agency referral protocols (e.g., between PRAIDA, shelters, and community organizations) and continuity mechanisms (such as shared intake information or warm handoffs) to reduce routing failures and prevent migrants from falling between systems.

Lead: Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / PRAIDA)

Partners: Ville de Montréal, shelter providers, settlement agencies, community organizations

2. Align administrative timelines with housing realities and urgency.

Reduce the temporal mismatch between immigration processes, temporary accommodations, and rental-market conditions through faster work authorization, coordinated transitions, and extended temporary housing where needed.

Lead: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec
Partners: PRAIDA, Ville de Montréal, other government and nonprofit housing providers

3. Improve access to clear, multilingual and reliable information.

Provide reliable, multilingual, and spatially grounded navigation tools directly, or improve/update existing ones, at arrival points—particularly Montréal–Trudeau International Airport—and through early reception systems to support timely access to housing, legal information, transportation, and essential services.

Lead: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec (PRAIDA / MSSS)

Partners: Aéroports de Montréal, Ville de Montréal, community organizations, settlement agencies, digital service providers

4. Expand access to rental housing through market mediation.

Scale mechanisms that substitute for missing credit histories and guarantors—such as nonprofit lease agreements, risk-reduction tools, and landlord partnerships—to convert financial capacity into real housing access.

Lead: Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) + Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Partners: Financial institutions, nonprofit housing organizations, municipalities, landlord associations

5. Shift from emergency stays to lasting housing solutions.

Expand transitional renting models that build rental histories, integrate employment supports, and create structured pathways toward independent housing.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + SHQ

Partners: Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC), nonprofit housing providers, employment agencies

6. Make safety and gender explicit housing design criteria.

Ensure that housing responses address risks related to violence, coercion, and dependency, particularly for women and migrants with precarious status.

Lead: Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / ministère responsable de la condition féminine)

Partners: Women's shelters, migrant-serving organizations, municipalities

7. Improve measurement of hidden homelessness.

Develop monitoring tools capable of capturing early housing precarity beyond shelters and street counts.

Lead: Statistics Canada + Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Partners: Ville de Montréal, universities, community organizations

8. Adopt a spatial approach: better connect services across the city to support housing stability.

Identify priority service hubs, align resources along accessible transit corridors, and incorporate locational criteria into housing programs to reduce mobility barriers and strengthen continuity of care.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM)

Partners: CIUSSS/CISSS, community organizations, SHQ

9. Phase in reforms to move from emergency responses to long-term stability.

Implement phased reforms that begin with coordinated referrals, navigation tools, and pilot transition supports, then expand rental mediation, bridge housing, and stabilization pathways toward durable housing outcomes.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + Gouvernement du Québec

Partners: HICC, SHQ, PRAIDA, community organizations, housing providers

10. Remove barriers to formal employment to support housing stabilization.

Facilitate migrants' access to local work experience by strengthening partnerships between community organizations and employers, including in regions facing labour shortages, to accelerate economic integration and reduce prolonged housing precarity.

Lead: IRCC + Emploi-Québec / Services Québec

Partners: Employers, chambers of commerce, community organizations

11. Reframe migrant homelessness through a process-based institutional lens

Recognize migrant homelessness as the outcome of institutional misalignment and cumulative housing precarity rather than isolated ruptures, enabling earlier intervention, improved detection of hidden homelessness, and stronger system alignment.

Lead: HICC + Gouvernement du Québec + Ville de Montréal

Partners: Universities, service providers, policy research organizations

Implementation Consideration

No single institution can resolve migrant homelessness alone. Effective responses require shared accountability across immigration, housing, social services, labour market, and municipal systems. A coordinated governance model should therefore accompany implementation.

SOMMAIRE EXÉCUTIF

L'itinérance migrante² est devenue un phénomène en croissance dans les villes canadiennes, tout en demeurant encore insuffisamment documenté et compris. Bien qu'il existe une vaste littérature sur l'itinérance d'une part, et sur l'intégration des personnes immigrantes d'autre part, l'intersection entre migration et itinérance demeure relativement peu étudiée. Le présent rapport vise à combler certaines de ces lacunes en examinant les facteurs, trajectoires, géographies et systèmes de soutien qui structurent l'itinérance migrante à Montréal, dans le but d'éclairer l'élaboration des politiques publiques et la conception des programmes.

Cette étude s'appuie sur une revue préalable de la littérature, laquelle a confirmé le faible niveau de connaissances empiriques disponibles sur l'itinérance migrante, ainsi que l'absence d'institutions ayant explicitement pour mandat principal de répondre à l'instabilité résidentielle des populations migrantes. En pratique, les services en itinérance se sont adaptés pour répondre aux besoins des migrants, tandis que les organismes d'accueil et d'intégration ont progressivement intégré l'aide au logement à leurs services de base. Le présent rapport expose donc les résultats d'un travail de terrain mené afin de compléter cette base de connaissances limitée et de produire des constats ancrés dans l'expérience du terrain.

Objectifs de recherche et méthodologie

La recherche s'est articulée autour de quatre grandes questions : quels facteurs conduisent les migrants vers l'itinérance et comment se déploient leurs trajectoires spatiales? Quelles ressources formelles et informelles mobilisent-ils? Dans quelle mesure les dispositifs de soutien existants, y compris l'hébergement temporaire, facilitent-ils ou freinent-ils l'accès à un logement stable? En quoi l'itinérance migrante se distingue-t-elle de l'itinérance dite domestique?

Après une analyse documentaire, un examen des rapports existants et une revue des statistiques disponibles, le travail de terrain a consisté principalement en entrevues avec des représentants d'organismes gouvernementaux et communautaires, ainsi qu'en entrevues et groupes de discussion avec des migrants en situation d'itinérance lorsque cela était possible. Au total, 13 experts et 22 migrants en situation d'itinérance ont participé à l'étude. Bien que l'accès direct à cette population se soit révélé plus difficile que prévu, les données recueillies ont permis de dégager des enseignements substantiels sur les dynamiques de l'itinérance migrante à Montréal.

Principaux constats

Les résultats indiquent que l'itinérance migrante à Montréal s'explique moins par des crises individuelles que par des décalages systémiques, des injustices structurelles et des délais entre les processus migratoires, les marchés du logement et les services de soutien. Des facteurs structurels, institutionnels et politiques — incluant la hausse des coûts du logement, les barrières administratives, la précarité juridique, l'exclusion raciale et les obstacles du marché locatif — se combinent pour produire une exposition prolongée à l'instabilité résidentielle.

Plutôt que de résulter d'une rupture unique, les trajectoires migrantes sont souvent marquées par une absence d'ancrage dès l'arrivée et par une accumulation graduelle de risques. Les périodes d'attente, l'absence de documents, les adresses instables et l'emploi précaire superposent les vulnérabilités, ce qui suggère que la prévention doit intervenir plus tôt que ce que présument les approches traditionnelles.

² Nous avons retenu le terme « migrant » puisqu'il s'agit du terme utilisé par nos partenaires de recherche. Comme il est expliqué dans la section d'introduction, dans le présent document le terme « migrants » désigne les immigrants, réfugiés, demandeurs d'asile, travailleurs temporaires, étudiants internationaux ou personnes en situation migratoire irrégulière, caractérisés par un faible capital social et économique et présents à Montréal depuis moins de deux ans.

Un mécanisme récurrent est le décalage temporel entre les échéanciers administratifs et l'urgence du marché locatif. Plusieurs programmes d'accueil à durée limitée supposent des transitions rapides vers le logement privé, alors que les migrants doivent souvent quitter ces dispositifs avant que des options viables ne soient disponibles.

La recherche met également en lumière des défaillances d'orientation au sein de systèmes institutionnels fragmentés. L'accès à un logement stable dépend fortement d'une connexion rapide aux bons services, aux réseaux sociaux, à une information fiable et à des mécanismes efficaces de référence. Lorsque ces conditions sont absentes, les migrants sont plus susceptibles d'alterner entre hébergements temporaires et arrangements informels. Ils s'appuient alors sur des services en itinérance déjà fortement sollicités, ainsi que sur des organismes d'accueil qui ont élargi leur mandat pour inclure l'aide au logement.

La précarité résidentielle est aussi produite à l'intérieur même du marché locatif privé, à travers des filtres d'exclusion tels que les exigences de dossier de crédit, de cautionnaires, de documentation ou encore la discrimination. Ces barrières poussent plusieurs migrants vers des logements surpeuplés, informels ou exploitants, qui demeurent souvent invisibles statistiquement.

Leurs trajectoires spatiales et leur usage de l'espace public urbain sont généralement limités. La composition des ménages — souvent familiale plutôt qu'individuelle — réduit la manière dont l'espace public peut être utilisé, comparativement à des populations locales dont l'itinérance est davantage visible.

Bien que les soutiens gouvernementaux, communautaires et informels permettent souvent d'éviter l'itinérance de rue immédiate, ils fonctionnent fréquemment comme un système temporaire qui prolonge la précarité plutôt que de permettre des sorties durables. Certaines pratiques prometteuses — notamment les programmes de médiation avec les propriétaires et de construction d'historique locatif — démontrent un potentiel important, mais demeurent de portée limitée.

Enfin, l'itinérance migrante se distingue significativement de l'itinérance domestique par ses causes, ses trajectoires et sa visibilité. Elle est majoritairement cachée, façonnée par l'exclusion administrative et les barrières structurelles, et concerne fréquemment des familles et des femmes exposées à des risques croisés liés à la sécurité, à la dépendance et à l'isolement social.

Recommandations principales

Les constats suggèrent que l'itinérance migrante est façonnée par un système institutionnel qui produit et entretient des conditions de vie précaires. Répondre à cette réalité exige de dépasser les seules réponses d'hébergement temporaire pour adopter des réponses structurelles élargissant l'accès au logement, à l'emploi et aux services, tout en réduisant les barrières administratives. Sans ces changements, les dispositifs temporaires risquent de reproduire l'instabilité plutôt que de la résoudre.

Les recommandations clés sont les suivantes :

1. Renforcer les points d'entrée et les mécanismes de référence afin de prévenir les ruptures de services.

Développer des protocoles de référence inter organisationnels (par exemple entre PRAIDA, les refuges et les organismes communautaires) ainsi que des mécanismes de continuité (tels que le partage d'informations à l'admission ou des transferts accompagnés) afin de réduire les défaillances d'orientation et d'éviter que les migrants ne se retrouvent entre plusieurs systèmes.

Responsable principal : Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / PRAIDA)

Partenaires : Ville de Montréal, fournisseurs d'hébergement d'urgence, organismes d'accueil et d'intégration, organismes communautaires

2. Mieux arrimer les échéanciers administratifs aux réalités du logement et à l'urgence des situations.

Réduire le décalage temporel entre les processus migratoires, l'hébergement temporaire et les conditions du marché locatif grâce à un accès plus rapide aux permis de travail, à des transitions coordonnées et à la prolongation de l'hébergement temporaire lorsque nécessaire.

Responsable principal : Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec

Partenaires : PRAIDA, Ville de Montréal, autres fournisseurs gouvernementaux et communautaires de logement

3. Améliorer l'accès à une information claire, multilingue et fiable.

Offrir, ou bonifier les outils existants, des outils d'orientation fiables, multilingues et ancrés spatialement aux points d'arrivée — notamment à l'aéroport international Montréal-Trudeau — ainsi qu'au sein des dispositifs d'accueil initial afin de faciliter l'accès rapide au logement, à l'information juridique, au transport et aux services essentiels.

Responsable principal : Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec (PRAIDA / MSSS)

Partenaires : Aéroports de Montréal, Ville de Montréal, organismes communautaires, organismes d'accueil et d'intégration, fournisseurs de services numériques

4. Accroître l'accès au logement locatif par des mécanismes de médiation de marché.

Déployer à plus grande échelle des mécanismes compensant l'absence d'historique de crédit ou de cautionnaire — tels que des baux conclus par des organismes sans but lucratif, des outils de réduction du risque et des partenariats avec les propriétaires — afin de transformer la capacité financière en accès réel au logement.

Responsable principal : Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ) + Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada (IRCC)

Partenaires : Institutions financières, organismes de logement sans but lucratif, municipalités, associations de propriétaires

5. Passer des séjours d'urgence à des solutions résidentielles durables.

Développer des modèles de location transitoire permettant de bâtir un historique locatif, d'intégrer des soutiens à l'emploi et de créer des parcours structurés vers un logement autonome.

Responsable principal : Ville de Montréal + SHQ

Partenaires : Logement, Infrastructures et Collectivités Canada (LICC), fournisseurs de logement sans but lucratif, organismes d'employabilité

6. Intégrer explicitement les enjeux de sécurité et de genre dans la conception des réponses résidentielles.

Veiller à ce que les réponses en logement tiennent compte des risques liés à la violence, à la coercition et à la dépendance, particulièrement pour les femmes et les migrants au statut précaire.

Responsable principal : Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / ministère responsable de la condition féminine)

Partenaires : maisons d'hébergement pour femmes, organismes au service des migrants, municipalités

7. Améliorer la mesure de l'itinérance cachée.

Développer des outils de suivi capables de capter les formes précoces de précarité résidentielle au-delà des refuges et des dénombrements de rue.

Responsable principal : Statistique Canada + Institut de la statistique du Québec

Partenaires : Ville de Montréal, universités, organismes communautaires

8. Adopter une approche territoriale : mieux relier les services à l'échelle de la ville pour soutenir la stabilité résidentielle.

Identifier des pôles de services prioritaires, arrimer les ressources le long de corridors de transport accessibles et intégrer des critères de localisation dans les programmes de logement afin de réduire les obstacles à la mobilité et de renforcer la continuité des services.

Responsable principal : Ville de Montréal + Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM)

Partenaires : CIUSSS/CISSS, organismes communautaires, SHQ

9. Mettre en œuvre les réformes de façon progressive afin de passer des réponses d'urgence à la stabilité durable.

Déployer des réformes graduelles débutant par des références coordonnées, des outils d'orientation et des projets pilotes de transition, puis élargir la médiation locative, les logements passerelles et les parcours de stabilisation menant à des résultats résidentiels durables.

Responsable principal : Ville de Montréal + Gouvernement du Québec

Partenaires : LICC, SHQ, PRAIDA, organismes communautaires, fournisseurs de logement

10. Réduire les obstacles à l'emploi formel comme levier de stabilisation résidentielle.

Faciliter l'accès des migrants à une première expérience de travail locale en renforçant les partenariats entre organismes communautaires et employeurs, y compris dans les régions confrontées à une pénurie de main-d'œuvre, afin d'accélérer l'intégration économique et de réduire la précarité résidentielle prolongée.

Responsable principal : IRCC + Emploi-Québec / Services Québec

Partenaires : employeurs, chambres de commerce, organismes communautaires

11. Repenser l'itinérance migrante à travers une lecture institutionnelle fondée sur les processus.

Reconnaître que l'itinérance migrante résulte davantage d'un désalignement institutionnel et d'une accumulation de précarité résidentielle que de ruptures isolées, afin de permettre des interventions plus précoces, une meilleure détection de l'itinérance cachée et un meilleur arrimage des systèmes.

Responsable principal : LICC + Gouvernement du Québec + Ville de Montréal

Partenaires : universités, fournisseurs de services, organismes de recherche et d'analyse des politiques publiques

Considération de mise en œuvre

Aucune institution ne peut, à elle seule, résoudre l'itinérance migrante. Des réponses efficaces exigent une responsabilité partagée entre les systèmes d'immigration, de logement, de services sociaux, d'emploi et les instances municipales. Un modèle de gouvernance coordonné devrait donc accompagner la mise en œuvre de ces recommandations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The research team: Liquid Space Lab (<https://www.liquidspacelab.org/>)

Liquid Space Lab is a think tank founded in Canada in 2022 by a group of experts in environmental design, architecture, and urban planning. We are dedicated to empowering and enabling societies made vulnerable by environmental and human-caused disasters, chronic poverty, conflict, and forced displacement. Liquid Space Lab carries out empirical research on vulnerable human settlements to ground its advice to governments at all levels, humanitarian organizations, and grassroots groups regarding these forms of human vulnerability and to improve the living conditions of the affected populations.

By applying the unique perspectives of environmental design, architecture, and urban planning to the conditions endured by those living in vulnerable settlements, Liquid Space Lab enhances the understanding and problem-solving capacity of the governments, humanitarian organizations, and grassroots groups involved in managing these situations for the sustained betterment of their residents' lives.

The Project: “Invisible Journeys: Documenting the Spatial and Housing Networks of Homeless Migrants in Montreal”

This research project examines specifically the phenomenon of homelessness amongst migrants in Montreal. At the time of submitting the preliminary report to CMHC in February 2026, the project *Invisible Journeys* was being carried out amid an ongoing homelessness crisis, intensified by harsh winter conditions and heavy snowfall. The City of Montreal has, as a result of this continuing crisis, made homelessness a priority for the following ten years and has begun grappling with the situation by, for example, opening “warming centres” and making a new short term housing complex in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough available for people transitioning out of homelessness. This homelessness problem is the straightforward result of insufficient housing that is affordable, a situation made especially frustrating by the thousands of vacant housing units in the city whose price exceeds what the homeless can afford.³ Accompanying this effort to ease the homelessness problem has been a property tax increase and a long term plan to build more affordable housing each year through to 2050.⁴ The recently-elected Mayor of Montreal campaigned in part on creating solutions for the homeless, over 100 of whom died of exposure to cold over the previous year. The city budget of January 2026 includes funds specifically earmarked for reducing homelessness. In other words, it has become well-recognized that homelessness is a major problem for Montreal.

In this context, the number of homeless migrants in the city continues to grow despite the federal and Quebec governments' efforts to reduce immigration flows to Canada, including of asylum seekers who appear to constitute a significant proportion of homeless migrants in the city. Although the number of homeless who are migrants has been growing, there has been relatively little work devoted to them. The housing crisis in Canada has received great attention from governments, news media, and academic researchers but very little has been paid to the migrants who count among Canada's homeless population beyond noting the correlation between high immigration levels and housing shortages. This research project was designed both to contribute to our understanding of this understudied situation and to promote this as an area deserving of more attention by researchers and governments. Liquid Space Lab considers the recommendations included in this report worth implementing. However, they are understood as only a starting point toward addressing a problem many regard as intractable—one that the Lab believes can be solved over time through sustained and continuous effort and research.

³ <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/montreal-second-modular-complex-opens-homelessness>

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-municipal-budget-2026-9.7040290>

Recent provincial data indicate that 12,077 people were experiencing visible homelessness in Quebec on a single night in April 2025, reflecting a continued increase since previous counts (Gouvernement du Québec, 2026). However, as a point-in-time enumeration, this figure captures only the visible portion of homelessness and likely underestimates the full scale of housing precarity, particularly among migrants navigating informal or unstable arrangements.

The current government of Canada has recognized the link between the shortage of affordable housing and the significantly elevated number of migrants that entered Canada over the previous decade.⁵ This increased number of migrants includes those with a permanent residency visa, a temporary residency visa, documented asylum seekers, and those with no legal documentation permitting their residency. At its height, 2021 saw nearly 500,000 immigrants arrive with permanent residency visas. In 2023, over one million migrants arrived, nearly 800,000 of whom carried temporary residency visas. This number dropped in 2024 to 725,000 migrants as the Canadian government acted to reduce the numbers, especially of temporary visa holders.

The number of visas on offer now is lower with the 2026 levels set at 380,000 permanent residency and 385,000 temporary visa arrivals. The number of students has been capped at 150,000, a dramatic reduction from previous years.⁶ These visa numbers can be carefully managed. What remains largely out of the direct control of the government is the number of asylum seekers arriving in Canada. Several measures have been undertaken to reduce the incentives for asylum seeking and these have had significant effects as can be seen in this graph for Quebec⁷:

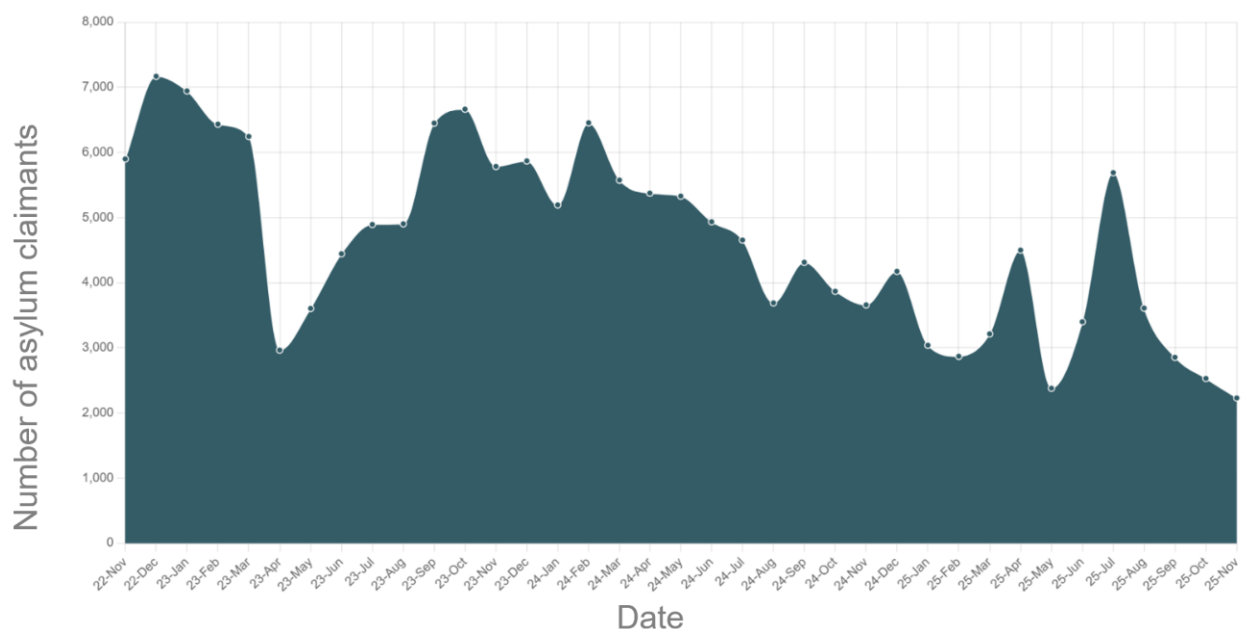


Figure 1: Asylum claimants in the province of Quebec, from November 2022 to November 2025

⁵ https://www.statista.com/statistics/443063/number-of-immigrants-in-canada/?srsltid=AfmBOooULf97bkSMC2h3n4QXKS06b4addFw2Yd_mzPdmFEv6vil51v0T

⁶ Details can be found at the website of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html>

⁷ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/statistics-open-data/immigration-stats/asylum-claims.html>

Although the overall number of asylum seekers to Quebec is dropping, the research carried out in this project revealed growing numbers arriving at the doors of organizations supporting both newcomers to Canada and the homeless. Homeless shelters in Montreal are notably seeing ever-larger numbers of asylum seekers looking for shelter. The research made it very clear that the underlying causes of homelessness amongst migrants are different from those of homeless Canadian citizens, indicating that the solutions, to have long-term benefits, must be different for each group. Nevertheless, the resources available to address migrant homelessness remain largely insufficient, revealing important gaps in the institutional response to this emerging reality.

Principal research objectives

This project seeks to document and analyze the spatial trajectories of homeless migrants in Montreal, a growing group with intersectional vulnerability that has not received adequate attention in existing housing research. It aims to explore the causes of their homelessness. It also investigates their formal and informal support networks and how existing housing support systems facilitate or hinder their access to stable housing. Finally, the project analyzes the similarities and differences between migrant and local forms of homelessness.

In the context of Canada's broader housing crisis, migrants (whether permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, or undocumented) are increasingly facing homelessness. This trend exacerbates the overall demand on already strained housing systems and support services. These homeless migrants, due to their news status, face distinct barriers to accessing affordable housing and social services, which compounds their vulnerabilities.

Our team adopts a comprehensive definition of 'homelessness,' encompassing both its visible aspects—such as individuals living on the streets or in shelters—and its less visible forms, including "couch-surfing" or residing in extremely inadequate or precarious conditions, such as overcrowded, unsafe, or unhealthy environments. Additionally, we draw on the definition of 'trajectory' provided by Aubry *et al.* (2013) which describes it as the dynamic and evolving pathway an individual follows through various housing situations, social networks, and geographic spaces, influenced by systemic factors, personal circumstances, and resource availability.

The issue of migrant homelessness is critical because homeless migrants often do not fit neatly into existing support frameworks, which are typically designed for domestic populations. These migrants face language barriers, stigma, economic instability, exploitation and limited access to government programs due to their immigration status. As such, they fall through the cracks of both social housing and homeless support systems, competing with local homeless populations for limited resources. The increasing visibility of migrants within homelessness contexts highlights existing pressures in housing markets—pressures that precede and extend beyond migration dynamics.

While recent data indicate that migrants represent a growing segment of the homeless population in Canada, this study does not interpret migrant homelessness as a driver of housing shortages. Rather, it reflects how existing housing systems, policies, and service frameworks fail to accommodate diverse and changing populations. In this sense, migrant homelessness should be understood as an indicator of systemic limitations—particularly in housing affordability, access to services, and administrative coordination—rather than as a cause of these pressures.

The project focused on three main research questions:

1. What drives migrants into homelessness, and what are their spatial trajectories? - (Mapping the spatial movements of homeless migrants to understand how they navigate urban spaces and temporary housing)

2. What resources (formal and informal) do homeless migrants utilize, and how effective are these in meeting their housing needs? - (Documenting the support networks they rely on, including formal government assistance, non-governmental organizations, and informal community-based supports)
3. How do existing housing support systems (governmental, community-based, and informal networks) help or hinder migrants in finding stable housing?

One additional question arose during the research:

4. How does migrant homelessness differ from local/domestic homelessness?

Migrants are often required to navigate complex and unfamiliar systems in the city into which they move, learn what it offers and where, learn how to get to these places and back, figure out where supports are, and where housing can be found. How they do this and with what degrees of success matters to their finding shelter.

Our first report, submitted in July 2025, included a review of the literature which confirmed our original impression that the literature on homelessness in general and on immigrants and their integration into the Canadian society was vast but that the literature specifically about homelessness amongst newcomers was paltry. It's only since 2019 that homeless migrants in Canada are mentioned in reports and in the literature, so, we are unsure if the phenomenon existed before or if it was overlooked. But since then, this has been a neglected field of study as well as a broadly neglected social phenomenon. Since the initial literature review was completed, additional literature has been examined, and the results of this subsequent review are included in this report.

Following the submission of our first report, the LSL research team has conducted fieldwork in the form of interviews of members of government, non-governmental organizations supporting homeless persons and newcomers to Canada, as well as with as many individual homeless migrants as possible. This last group proved to be more difficult to reach than anticipated when the project was designed and, therefore, the numbers of individual homeless migrants interviewed is somewhat reduced from the initial plan. Regardless, the interviews proved fruitful and revealed important insights into the phenomena regarding migrant homelessness in Montreal.

To a certain extent, the fieldwork was carried out because of the lack of academic and other literature on migrant homelessness. The literature was simply insufficient as a base for further analyses, conclusions, and recommendations. This report presents, in addition to the consolidated literature review, the results of that fieldwork, the principal findings, our analysis of these findings, conclusions drawn from the analysis, and recommendations for policy development and programming.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF HOMELESSNESS AND MIGRATION

The term “migrant” is used in this report as an operational and inclusive category reflecting both the terminology adopted by research partners and the diversity of statuses observed in the field. In the literature, “migrant” is commonly employed as a broad umbrella term encompassing individuals with different legal and administrative statuses, including immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, temporary workers, and international students (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Walsh et al., 2016). While these categories are distinct in legal and policy terms, research increasingly emphasizes that they often share overlapping experiences of housing precarity linked to limited access to resources, unfamiliarity with local systems, and exposure to structural barriers in housing markets. In this report, the term refers specifically to individuals who have recently arrived in Montreal—generally within the past two years—and who face constrained social and economic capital, conditions that significantly shape their housing trajectories.

2.1 Literature and statistical facts

Literature highlights

The academic literature specifically addressing homelessness among migrants in Canada remains limited. Existing analyses rely heavily on administrative shelter data and occasional point-in-time counts, which provide only a partial view of the phenomenon. Hidden homelessness—such as overcrowding, couch surfing, and other precarious arrangements—remains particularly understudied and poorly measured statistically. Even more limited is research grounded in empirical fieldwork involving direct interviews with migrants experiencing homelessness. There is also a notable absence of literature examining migrants’ use of public space, leaving unanswered whether their spatial practices differ significantly from those of Canadian-born homeless populations.

Where explanations are offered, they often mirror those found in the broader homelessness literature, emphasizing poverty, unemployment, illness, and the shortage of affordable housing. However, addictions and severe mental health challenges appear less central in migrant trajectories than in some domestic homelessness pathways. More specific migrant-related explanations tend to focus on discrimination, limited proficiency in the host society’s language, unfamiliarity with institutions, social norms, and barriers to inclusion, and difficulties navigating local systems—factors that are consistent with the wider literature on immigrant integration in Canada.

Recent research in Ontario mid-sized cities (Dej *et al.*, 2025) further highlights the paradoxical effects of attempts to render homelessness invisible. Policies and public discourse aimed at displacing homeless individuals from public view, or restricting supportive infrastructure, often produce greater visibility, deeper exclusion, and worsening health outcomes. These findings resonate with trends observed in Montreal, where pressures to move visible homelessness elsewhere and resistance to new support resources may similarly entrench the problem, particularly for migrants facing additional barriers to stability.

More broadly, the literature remains divided between explanations emphasizing a combination of individual vulnerabilities and structural conditions, and those locating homelessness primarily in systemic factors such as housing markets, labour precarity, and institutional exclusion. Finally, a small but growing body of research examines the role of social networks and information and communication technologies (ICTs) among recent and transient migrants. A recurring concept in this emerging field is trust, particularly the importance of reliable information in helping newcomers navigate services, housing opportunities, and unfamiliar urban environments.

Statistical highlights

- Montreal participated in the provincial point-in-time homelessness count conducted on April 15, 2025. Preliminary results now available indicate a continued increase in visible homelessness across Québec, with an estimated 12,077 individuals experiencing visible homelessness on a single night, including over 5,000 in Montreal alone. These early findings confirm and extend previous trends, including a ~20% increase between 2022 and 2025, reinforcing evidence of sustained upward pressure on homelessness across the province ([Consult the report here](#)).
- In Canada, non-citizens constituted an estimated 8.9% of the emergency shelter user population in 2023, meaning that they are proportionally represented. Notably, asylum seekers are overrepresented, constituting 0.8% of the Canadian population in 2023, versus 2.6% of the shelter-using population in the same year ([Consult the report here](#)).
- Between 2022 and 2024, the proportion of migrants among the homeless increased slightly to approximately 20%. But the overall percentage of migrants who are homeless is below their total share of the population which, for Montreal, approaches 40% if non-permanent residents such as international students and temporary foreign workers are included. In other words, migrants are less likely to be homeless than non-migrants.
- A significantly higher proportion of shelter users who were immigrants (27.1%), resettled refugees (21.0%) and asylum seekers (37.0%) used family shelters between 2020 and 2023 compared to Canadian citizens (14.7%). This indicates that certain groups of non-citizens were more likely than Canadian citizens to access shelters as part of a family, which also explains the younger age profile among non-citizens ([Consult the report here](#)).
- A significantly higher proportion of temporary visa holders (12.3%) accessed youth shelters compared to Canadian citizens (5.6%). This is unsurprising considering that those coming to the country under student visas and temporary foreign workers are included among this group. Resettled refugees (11.0%) were also more likely to access youth shelters compared to Canadian citizens. There was no statistically significant difference in youth shelter access among any other groups ([Consult the report here](#)).
- There was no statistical difference in length of stay among Canadian citizens staying in individual shelters versus family shelters. However, immigrants, resettled refugees, asylum seekers, and visa holders who accessed family shelters stayed significantly longer than their single counterparts. This may be due to factors including family size, housing discrimination and available supports.
- Immigrant families stayed significantly more days in shelters compared to Canadians families. There was no significant difference in stay length between Canadians accessing family shelters and any other non-citizen group. Single refugees and asylum claimants stayed significantly fewer days in shelters on average compared to Canadians. There were no significant differences between any other groups ([Consult the report here](#)).
- According to a recent public consultation (OCPM, 2025), homelessness in Montreal increased by 33% between 2018 and 2022. The total number of homeless persons in Montreal was estimated to be 4,690 in 2022, and they were found to be unevenly distributed throughout the city with the largest concentration being in Ville-Marie followed by the Plateau and Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve. Official statistics show that migrants occupy a significant and growing segment of this homeless population, and given the current migration environment in Canada and the US, it is likely that these numbers will continue to rise, especially for asylum seekers.
- Chronic homelessness increased by over 22% between 2017 and 2021 (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2019).
- Migrants and asylum seekers represent a growing share of those accessing emergency and temporary shelters in Canada and Montreal (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2025). While local

estimates suggest that migrants account for some proportion of the visibly homeless population, the true scope of migrant homelessness is likely much higher due to the prevalence of hidden forms of housing precarity, such as overcrowding, couch surfing, and other informal arrangements (Gravel, 2020; Rodrigue, 2016).

2.2 Landscape: migrant homelessness in Canada and Quebec

Rethinking homelessness beyond visibility

Homelessness in Canada has historically been conceptualized through the lens of visibility, chronicity, and individual vulnerability. Federal shelter data indicate that Canadian-born populations are more likely to experience recurrent and chronic homelessness, often linked to substance use and mental health challenges (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2024; Smith & Kopec, 2023).

Chronic homelessness increased by over 22% between 2017 and 2021, reinforcing the persistence of emergency-system reliance among this group (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2019). When homelessness is framed primarily as visible and individualized, policy responses tend to prioritize shelters, policing of public space, and behavioral interventions rather than structural transformation (Nelson *et al.*, 2021; Smith & Kopec, 2023).

This dominant paradigm, however, obscures forms of housing precarity that do not conform to street-based imagery. Québec scholarship has played a decisive role in challenging this narrow framing. *L'itinérance au Québec: réalités, ruptures et citoyenneté* reconceptualizes homelessness as a process of social disaffiliation rooted in cumulative ruptures across housing, employment, health, and institutional systems (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). Rather than a binary condition separating the housed from the unhoused, homelessness is understood as a continuum encompassing visible homelessness, hidden homelessness, and situations of extreme housing risk (Gravel, 2020).

Québec's interministerial homelessness action plan similarly situates homelessness within broader dynamics of social exclusion and explicitly identifies migratory status as a risk factor (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). For migrants, whose legal and social citizenship may be partial or conditional, this processual understanding is particularly salient. Migratory status often structures exposure to institutional ruptures, including abrupt exits from reception systems, loss of eligibility for services, and exclusion from social housing (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025).

These ruptures may not immediately produce street homelessness, but frequently initiate trajectories of instability aligned with process-based definitions of homelessness. A growing body of literature further emphasizes that housing insecurity among migrants must be understood through intersectional dynamics involving discrimination, health, and family context (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024).

Hidden homelessness and the limits of measurement

Hidden homelessness constitutes one of the most significant epistemological challenges in homelessness research. It refers to situations in which individuals lack stable housing yet avoid shelters or street exposure, including overcrowding, couch surfing, temporary stays with acquaintances, motel living, and unsafe arrangements (Centraide du Grand Montréal, 2025; Gravel, 2020). Within the Canadian definition, even newcomers housed temporarily in reception facilities may fall within this category when continuity of residence is not guaranteed (Gravel, 2020). Methodological limitations further obscure the phenomenon. Point-in-time counts, widely used to estimate homelessness, capture only a fraction of those experiencing housing precarity (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024). This data gap constitutes a major policy and research challenge affecting multiple populations, including youth, women fleeing violence, Indigenous peoples, couch surfers, and migrants whose housing precarity often remains outside visible counts. At the same time,

existing measures focused on shelters and street homelessness remain essential for monitoring trends in visible homelessness, service pressures, and changes in chronic or unsheltered populations. Hidden homelessness represents a significant but undercounted dimension of homelessness in Canada, with approximately 8% of the population having experienced it at some point (Gravel, 2020; Rodrigue, 2016). In Quebec, provincial survey data suggest that approximately 4.2% of individuals aged 15 and over have experienced hidden homelessness over their lifetime, reinforcing similar concerns at the provincial level (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2022).

Migrants are disproportionately affected by these invisible forms of homelessness, particularly women, families, asylum seekers, and individuals with precarious status (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Taylor, 2011; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Fear of detection, limited knowledge of tenant rights, and reliance on fragile informal networks intensify vulnerability. National and regional research indicates that many migrants possess limited knowledge of the housing market and tenant protections, even years after arrival (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Immigration Refugees and Citizenship - Canada, 2023; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Importantly, individuals experiencing hidden homelessness often do not self-identify as homeless, deepening their statistical invisibility and delaying institutional response (Gravel, 2020).

Migratory status as a structural determinant

A growing body of Canadian research identifies migratory status as a central determinant of housing insecurity. A scoping review of 52 Canadian studies concludes that homelessness among migrants is an expanding concern within the broader national housing crisis (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024). Adequate housing—defined as affordable, suitable, and in good repair—is widely recognized as essential for successful settlement and socioeconomic integration, yet remains difficult to access for many newcomers (Bachour, 2024; CMHC, 2024). In 2021, more than one quarter (27.8 %) of households in the Montréal CMA spent 30 % or more of their income on shelter costs, indicating persistent affordability pressures in the region (Statistics Canada, 2023). Renters were disproportionately affected, with well over 200,000 renter households facing high housing cost burdens. Immigrant households are more likely to rent and more likely to experience affordability challenges and overcrowding (Statistics Canada, 2022). These patterns underscore heightened housing vulnerability among newcomer populations. National census data further show that 37.8% of recent migrants renter households live in crowded housing conditions—nearly twice the rate observed among renter households overall (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Federal data further reveal disparities within homelessness systems. Although asylum seekers constitute a small share of the national population, they are overrepresented in shelter systems (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2019, 2024). This characterizes provinces that do not have the equivalent of PRAIDA and where asylum seekers are accommodated in homeless shelters. Media and policy reporting have also documented growing pressures on shelter systems in Canadian cities, where asylum seekers have at times been left without accommodation when emergency capacities were exceeded (Milton, 2023). Demographic data indicate that migrant homeless people are young, approximately 55% being between 25 and 49 years old. Roughly 70% are male (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b).

The drivers of homelessness differ markedly across populations. Research suggests that while homelessness among Canadian-born individuals is often associated with mental health and substance use challenges, migrant experiences more frequently involve insufficient income, landlord conflicts, discrimination, and institutional barriers (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Gaetz *et al.*, 2016). Despite assumptions that refugees in particular benefit from preferential access to housing supports, research indicates that settlement agencies largely rely on the private rental market, often resulting in unaffordable or overcrowded housing arrangements (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Forchuk *et al.*, 2022).

These dynamics highlight homelessness not as an individual failure but as a structurally mediated outcome shaped by legal status, eligibility regimes, and housing market constraints.

Families, gender, and differentiated vulnerabilities

Another critical distinction between migrant and domestic homelessness lies in household composition. Migrant homelessness disproportionately affects families with children, whereas homelessness among Canadian-born individuals remains largely concentrated among single adults, particularly men (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Gaetz *et al.*, 2016; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021). Qualitative research with refugee youth further shows that housing instability intersects with mental health stressors, social isolation, and uncertainty around status, while resilience is often sustained through peer networks and community supports (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Federal shelter data indicate that nearly half of shelter users are part of family households, compared to a much smaller share among Canadian-born users; among asylum seekers, the majority are accommodated as families (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2019). Family homelessness carries distinct harms, including disrupted schooling, food insecurity, overcrowding, and long-term developmental impacts on children (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). Shelter systems, historically designed to respond primarily to single adults, remain insufficiently adapted to the needs of families (Gaetz, 2020; Nelson *et al.*, 2021).

Gender further shapes vulnerability. Women experiencing hidden homelessness often rely on informal arrangements—such as couch surfing, temporary stays with acquaintances or extended family, informal subletting, transactional relationships for shelter, or overcrowded shared housing—that may expose them to exploitation, coercion, or violence (Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Intersectional analyses demonstrate that migrant women particularly face layered barriers related to language, employment access, caregiving responsibilities, and discrimination (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley *et al.*, 2019)

These relational dynamics challenge policy frameworks centered on individual autonomy and shelter-based solutions.

Spatial practices and urban navigation

Migrant homelessness often manifests in less visible spatial forms. Rather than appearing predominantly in street-based or encampment settings, many migrants rely on semi-public and private spaces, including temporary arrangements with acquaintances or community networks (Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Such strategies may reduce visibility within public space while simultaneously limiting institutional recognition. Urban service geographies further complicate access to support: settlement services, housing resources, and homelessness programs are frequently fragmented and spatially dispersed, requiring migrants to navigate complex urban systems while managing transportation costs, language barriers, and legal precarity (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025).

Research on immigrant neighborhoods in Montreal indicates that precarious private rentals—such as overcrowded apartments, informal sublets, short-term rooming arrangements, poorly maintained units, or housing with insecure tenure—structure much of migrant residential settlement, although some households achieve longer-term stability through access to social housing (Reiser, 2020). This uneven distribution reflects both structural barriers and migrant agency in navigating housing systems.

Governance fragmentation and preventable homelessness

Across the literature, migrant homelessness is frequently described as largely preventable. Research suggests that early access to stable housing, rent supplements, and coordinated case management could avert many trajectories before they escalate into crisis (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Yet governance fragmentation—across federal immigration policy, provincial housing programs, and municipal homelessness services—creates systemic gaps that migrants may fall through. Temporary reception

systems often operate independently of longer-term housing pathways, while eligibility criteria for social housing can exclude individuals with precarious status (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025).

This fragmentation contrasts with national policy narratives emphasizing collaboration. In fact, Canada's federal homelessness strategy underscores the importance of coordination among municipalities, community organizations, and other stakeholders (Gouvernement du Canada, 2018; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2019).

However, the persistence of migrant homelessness suggests a disconnect between policy intent and institutional capacity.

Montreal as a critical urban laboratory

Montreal occupies a distinctive position within the Canadian migration–homelessness nexus. According to the 2021 Census, immigrants born outside Canada comprised approximately one-third of the city's population (about 576,000 individuals), underscoring Montreal's longstanding role as a key settlement destination (Statistics Canada, 2022). The metropolitan housing market has tightened considerably: vacancy rates in the Montreal CMA stood at roughly 1.6% in 2023, while rents continued to rise (CMHC, 2024). Concurrently, the number of people experiencing visible homelessness in Montreal reached 4,690 in 2022, with strong spatial concentration in central districts such as Ville-Marie (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024). Municipal policy responses have increasingly focused on the regulation and management of encampments and public-space cohabitation (OCPM, 2025). Research in Montreal further documents how neighbourhood-level policing practices shape the spatial governance of homelessness, reinforcing patterns of containment and displacement rather than structural resolution (Brais & Laniyonu, 2025). Service providers nevertheless emphasize that visible counts capture only a fraction of migrant homelessness, particularly among families and women who avoid shelters (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Gravel, 2020).

Montreal thus embodies a broader paradox: migrant homelessness is simultaneously overrepresented within emergency systems and underrepresented in public space and official counts.

Beyond snapshot approaches: toward a differentiated epistemology

The literature increasingly calls for a differentiated epistemology of homelessness—one recognizing that migrant and Canadian-born homelessness are produced through distinct structural and institutional mechanisms (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024).

Migrant trajectories typically unfold through gradual transitions rather than abrupt ruptures, moving from reception facilities to overcrowded rentals, informal networks, or employer-provided housing before potentially entering shelter systems (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022). Canadian-born trajectories, by contrast, more often involve sudden housing loss followed by recurrent cycles of shelter use.

These insights challenge snapshot-based measurement tools and short-term emergency responses. Trajectory-based analyses reveal migrant homelessness as a dynamic, relational process shaped by temporal mismatches between immigration, housing, and service systems (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). These gaps are widening due to the erratic changes in immigration policies, such as the expansion of the Safe Third Country Agreement in 2023—which entails extending the application of the Safe Third Country Agreement to the entire land border between Canada and the USA, including irregular crossings.

Synthesis: migration as a lens for rethinking homelessness

Taken together, the literature suggests that migrant homelessness is neither marginal nor incidental. It exposes the limitations of visibility-based paradigms and underscores the need for longitudinal, status-sensitive, and spatially informed approaches. Hidden homelessness, governance fragmentation, and structural discrimination emerge as central mechanisms through which housing precarity is produced (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024).

Recognizing these dynamics reframes migrant homelessness not as a failure of integration but as the outcome of systemic misalignment between protection regimes and housing systems. In this sense, migration offers a critical lens through which to rethink homelessness itself—shifting the analytical focus from individual vulnerability toward institutional responsibility and urban inclusion.

2.3 Trajectories: Institutional pathways and the production of migrant homelessness

Arrival as a structuring moment in housing trajectories

We draw on the trajectory approach used by (Aubry *et al.*, 2013), which conceptualizes housing pathways as dynamic and evolving trajectories an individual follows through various housing situations, social networks, and geographic spaces, influenced by systemic factors, personal circumstances, and resource availability. Homelessness trajectories have traditionally been conceptualized as unfolding after a moment of rupture such as job loss, family breakdown, eviction, or institutional discharge (Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). This model, widely documented in Canadian homelessness literature, often conceptualizes homelessness as emerging following a destabilizing event affecting individuals who were previously housed (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). Emerging research on migrant homelessness, however, challenges this sequential logic (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Samari & Groot, 2023). For many asylum seekers, housing precarity begins not after settlement has failed but at the very point of arrival, before any residential anchoring has occurred (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Recent Canadian and Quebec-based studies demonstrate that asylum seekers are exposed to housing risk immediately upon entry, long before integration processes unfold, thereby positioning reception infrastructures as upstream sites in the production of homelessness (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2024)

When individuals arrive at a Canadian airport and claim asylum, they enter a federally governed admissibility process administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency (Gouvernement du Canada, 2018; Immigration Refugees and Citizenship - Canada, 2023). This process establishes legal eligibility to seek protection but does not include a guaranteed pathway to stable housing (ÉRIQA, 2024; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2024). Instead, asylum seekers are released into a fragmented reception landscape characterized by short-term orientation, temporary accommodation, and rapid transitions between institutional actors, a pattern repeatedly documented in empirical and policy-oriented research on migrant housing precarity (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). The reception process therefore functions not merely as an administrative threshold but as a structuring moment shaping subsequent spatial and institutional trajectories (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025).

In Quebec, and particularly in Montreal, this reception landscape is mediated through the *Programme régional d'accueil et d'intégration des demandeurs d'asile* (PRAIDA), which provides psychosocial assessment, referral to legal and community resources, and limited emergency accommodation (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Although PRAIDA plays an essential role in preventing immediate street homelessness, multiple sources emphasize that it operates primarily as a triage and orientation mechanism rather than as a settlement or housing program (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; RAPSIM, 2025). Housing support is time-limited, conditional on the application to be hosted being made within the first ten days after

arrival in Canada. contingent on system capacity, and structurally disconnected from the realities of the private rental market, especially in a context marked by historically low vacancy rates and escalating rents (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; OCPM, 2025).

This institutional configuration produces a structural contradiction: asylum seekers are recognized as legally present and in need of protection, yet are released into a housing market characterized by scarcity, affordability constraints, and documented discrimination (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021; Springer, 2021). As a result, many transition rapidly from formal reception spaces—including airports, reception centres, temporary hotels, and shelters—into precarious private arrangements such as overcrowded rentals, informal subletting, or reliance on extended networks (Dej *et al.*, 2025; Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Reiser, 2020; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Rather than representing a deviation from the expected pathway, these transitions increasingly appear as systemic outcomes of institutional design (ÉRIQA, 2024; OCPM, 2025).

Institutional transitions and the geography of precarity

Conceptualizing migrant homelessness as a sequence of institutional transitions rather than a singular event provides a useful analytical lens (Clapham, 2003; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). Each transition is governed by a distinct policy logic—immigration control, emergency response, and housing market access—creating temporal and functional mismatches that systematically generate housing insecurity (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022). The initial transition occurs when asylum seekers are released from federal processing into provincial and municipal systems without an integrated handoff to housing supports (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). This moment is administrative rather than residential; legal recognition is granted without continuity of shelter (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b).

Provincial reception structures are designed for short temporal horizons, often measured in days or weeks (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; RAPSIM, 2025). Exit deadlines are typically driven by program capacity rather than by successful housing outcomes, effectively shifting the burden of securing accommodation onto newcomers before they possess the resources to do so (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; OCPM, 2025). The trigger for exit is the receipt of the first social assistance cheque of \$800 per month, at which point individuals are required to leave and find their own housing. The subsequent transition—from reception to emergency shelters or temporary hotels—frequently occurs before work authorization or income stabilization has been achieved, intensifying vulnerability and narrowing available housing options (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2024, 2025b).

Emergency accommodations, while essential, were historically designed for short stays and are poorly adapted to the needs of migrant families or long-term planning (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022). Federal shelter data and Montreal-based reports confirm that migrant families often remain in these settings for extended periods and may experience repeated relocations across sites, undermining continuity in schooling, employment, and service access (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b; OCPM, 2025; RAPSIM, 2025). Over time, prolonged temporariness becomes normalized, transforming emergency infrastructures into de facto transitional housing without the resources or mandate to support durable stabilization (Grimard, 2011; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

The transition into the private rental market represents another critical juncture. Low vacancy rates, income insufficiency, documentation barriers, poor credit history and discrimination combine to exclude many newcomers from formal housing pathways (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021). Consequently, migrants frequently rely on informal arrangements that shift homelessness from institutional settings into hidden forms (Gravel, 2020; Rodrigue, 2016). This movement—from visible emergency accommodation toward extra-institutional housing insecurity—constitutes a defining feature of migrant trajectories (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Walsh *et al.*, 2016).

Hidden homelessness often unfolds through couch surfing, overcrowded apartments, or repeated short-term leases (Gravel, 2020; Reiser, 2020; Rodrigue, 2016). These arrangements allow individuals to avoid shelters and preserve a degree of dignity or family stability but simultaneously heighten exposure to exploitation and limit access to formal support systems (Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Because such situations remain largely invisible to enumeration tools, homelessness becomes statistically obscured even as residential instability persists (Ali, 2018; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; OCPM, 2025).

Across these stages, several cross-cutting dynamics structure migrant trajectories. Temporal mismatches between immigration timelines, service eligibility, and housing markets create prolonged vulnerability; partial eligibility blocks access to prevention tools; and reliance on informal and semi-private living arrangements—such as staying with acquaintances, overcrowded housing, or temporary sublets—diffuses homelessness across the urban fabric rather than concentrating it in visible locations (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). The cumulative outcome is a form of homelessness produced less by individual failure than by systemic misalignment (ÉRIQA, 2024).

Comparative trajectories: migrant and Canadian-born homelessness

Contrasting migrant trajectories with those of Canadian-born populations clarifies the specificity of these processes. Canadian-born homelessness is frequently cyclical, involving recurrent shelter use and visible occupation of public space (Grimard, 2011; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025a). Migrant trajectories, by comparison, tend to be linear yet prolonged, characterized by extended shelter stays followed by transitions into hidden homelessness rather than repeated institutional cycling (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). This distinction helps explain why migrants are often overrepresented in long shelter stays while remaining underrepresented in street counts. Rather than transitioning into street-based homelessness, many rely on temporary, informal, or overcrowded living arrangements or remain within institutional accommodations for extended periods, which reduces their visibility in public space. (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024; OCPM, 2025).

Importantly, migrants do not become homeless primarily through social disaffiliation but through institutional desynchronization (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Whereas domestic homelessness often involves weakened relational ties, migrants may maintain strong social networks even while facing structural barriers to housing (Reiser, 2020; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Their vulnerability is therefore less relational than institutional, rooted in gaps between protection regimes and housing systems (Smith, 2022).

Refugee recognition as a secondary critical juncture: when legal certainty is faster than residential stability

If airport reception constitutes the first upstream site of homelessness production, refugee recognition represents a second critical threshold. In dominant migration frameworks, recognition is commonly framed as the transition from vulnerability to stability, marking the beginning of integration (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship - Canada, 2023). Legally, this shift is substantial: recognized refugees gain protected status, unrestricted access to the labor market, eligibility for provincial income assistance, and the right to apply for permanent residence (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship - Canada, 2023). Yet a growing body of research demonstrates that this legal transition does not constitute a housing transition (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Samari & Groot, 2023). Instead, recognition frequently produces a reconfiguration of housing risk rather than its resolution. Support programs specifically designed for asylum seekers are often withdrawn just as individuals are expected to become self-sufficient, forcing them to rely on general settlement services or, in some cases, homelessness support systems. (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022). This policy handoff signals reduced vulnerability institutionally, even as substantial barriers to housing persist, including insufficient income relative to rents, discrimination, lack of credit history, and shortages of family-sized units (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021).

In Montreal, these barriers are amplified by acute housing scarcity (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024; OCPM, 2025). Municipal data further highlight persistent inequalities in housing access, discrimination experiences, and socio-economic vulnerability among immigrant populations in Montreal, reinforcing the intersectional dimensions of housing precarity (Ville de Montréal, 2023). Research in other jurisdictions similarly shows that refugees navigating public housing and redevelopment contexts often encounter spatial displacement, institutional barriers, and limited access to stable units, reinforcing the structural dimensions of post-recognition housing insecurity (Kleit & Manzo, 2013). Many recognized refugees remain in shelters, temporary hotels, or overcrowded housing for extended periods, particularly families with children (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b; RAPSIM, 2025). Over time, homelessness becomes less visible and more dispersed, shifting toward informal subletting, shared accommodations, and dependence on extended networks (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Reiser, 2020; Walsh *et al.*, 2016) This transition reduces public visibility while prolonging instability, contributing to the systematic undercounting of refugee homelessness (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020).

From a conceptual standpoint, refugee recognition should therefore be understood not as an endpoint but as a second upstream site in the production of homelessness—one situated at the intersection of integration policy and housing systems (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022). Legal stabilization often occurs faster than material and residential stabilization, producing a temporal gap in which individuals are protected yet residentially exposed (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Samari & Groot, 2023). Without coordinated housing strategies extending beyond recognition—such as transitional housing, rent supplements, and family-adapted units—recognition risks functioning as a symbolic resolution rather than a substantive one (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; Tria Espinoza & Randle, 2025).

Toward a trajectory-based understanding of migrant homelessness

Taken together, the literature calls for a shift from snapshot approaches toward trajectory-based analyses capable of capturing the dynamic and relational nature of migrant housing precarity (Clapham, 2003; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). Migrant homelessness unfolds across multiple institutional transitions, each governed by distinct policy logics and temporalities (ÉRIQA, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Policy debates in Canadian cities have also highlighted how gaps in coordination between immigration reception, settlement services, and housing systems can contribute to the use of emergency shelters by asylum seekers despite the existence of community-based supports designed to prevent homelessness (Reesor-McDowell & Taylor, 2024). Research on homeless mobilities in Canada further demonstrates that housing instability often involves inter-regional and intra-urban movements shaped by service availability, institutional rules, and housing constraints, underscoring the spatial dimension of homelessness trajectories (Kaufman, 2021). This perspective reveals how vulnerability is produced not at a single point but through cumulative processes in which legal recognition, service eligibility, and housing access operate out of sync (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; Smith, 2022).

Situating the airport as the first node and refugee recognition as a second structural threshold makes visible a continuum of precariousness extending across (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Samari & Groot, 2023). While legal stability increases over time, housing risk often persists, becoming progressively less visible yet more entrenched (Gravel, 2020; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Compared with Canadian-born homelessness—which is more frequently cyclical and institutionally managed—migrant homelessness is typically longer in duration, more family-based, and structurally embedded within housing markets rather than homelessness systems (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2024; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

Understanding migrant homelessness through the lens of institutional transitions ultimately reframes it as a systemic outcome rather than a failure of integration (Smith, 2022). The persistence of these trajectories underscores the need for analytical and policy approaches that address not only entry into asylum systems but also the post-recognition phase in which homelessness becomes increasingly hidden and normalized within urban housing landscapes (OCPM, 2025; RAPSIM, 2025).

2.4 Homelessness concepts: dominant lenses for interpreting housing instability

From typologies to conceptual lenses

Over the past three decades, homelessness research has undergone a significant conceptual expansion, shifting from narrow definitions centered on rooflessness toward broader understandings that incorporate instability, insecurity, and social exclusion (Gaetz, 2012; Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Gaetz *et al.*, 2016; Gravel, 2020). Early policy frameworks in North America often equated homelessness with visible deprivation—individuals living on the streets or residing in emergency shelters (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). However, scholars and policymakers increasingly recognize that homelessness encompasses a continuum of housing situations ranging from chronic street homelessness to temporary, precarious, and hidden arrangements (Clapham, 2003; Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Rodrigue, 2016).

Canadian definitions now reflect this expanded scope. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness defines homelessness as the absence of stable, permanent, and appropriate housing, encompassing unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally accommodated, and at-risk populations (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, Quebec scholarship frames homelessness as a process rather than a fixed state, highlighting the importance of structural factors such as labor market transformations, affordable housing shortages, and institutional practices in shaping pathways into housing insecurity (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

Within this evolving literature, numerous typologies and analytical models have been developed to describe the diversity of homelessness trajectories. One foundational contribution has been the development of typologies distinguishing between **chronic, episodic, and transitional homelessness** (Gaetz *et al.*, 2013; Gaetz *et al.*, 2016). These categories help researchers and policymakers understand that homelessness does not occur in the same way for everyone and that individuals experience housing instability through different trajectories.

Chronic homelessness refers to situations where individuals remain homeless for long periods or cycle continuously between shelters and public spaces, often for several years. According to Hughes (2026), chronic homelessness refers to a person experiencing homelessness for a continuous period of at least six months. Individuals in this category frequently face complex and overlapping challenges, including serious physical or mental health conditions, substance use issues, and limited access to stable income or support networks (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025a).

Episodic homelessness describes situations in which individuals move repeatedly in and out of homelessness over time. Instead of remaining homeless continuously, they experience several episodes of housing loss separated by periods of temporary stability. For example, an individual may stay temporarily with friends, then enter a shelter, later obtain short-term housing, and eventually lose it again. The defining feature is the recurrence of housing instability rather than the duration of a single episode (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016).

Transitional homelessness, by contrast, refers to shorter and often one-time experiences of housing loss, typically triggered by a specific crisis such as eviction, job loss, or family separation. In these cases, individuals or households may enter a shelter or rely on temporary arrangements for a limited period before regaining stable housing (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016).

While such typologies help describe patterns of housing instability, they do not fully explain the mechanisms through which homelessness is produced. Over time, the literature has increasingly shifted from descriptive classifications toward conceptual frameworks capable of explaining how homelessness trajectories emerge. Two lenses have been particularly influential in interpreting homelessness in Canada and other high-income contexts: **rupture**, which emphasizes critical life events that precipitate housing loss, and **disaffiliation**, which highlights the gradual erosion of social integration.

Moments of rupture and critical life events

Within pathway-oriented literature, the concept of **moments of rupture** occupies a central place. Often described as critical life events, turning points, or pathway disruptions, these moments refer to identifiable events that precipitate a sudden break from housing stability (Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Polillo & Sylvestre, 2021; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). Common examples include eviction, relationship dissolution, job loss, institutional discharge, or acute health crises (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

The analytical strength of rupture lies in its narrative clarity. It posits an identifiable “before” and “after,” allowing researchers to trace causal sequences leading to homelessness (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). This framing has proven influential in both research and policy, particularly in Canada, where prevention programs frequently target populations at risk of experiencing such destabilizing events (Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Gouvernement du Canada, 2015). Pathway approaches conceptualize homelessness as unfolding through sequences of life events shaped by interactions between individuals, institutions, and housing markets (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Clapham, 2003). Research further demonstrates that pathways into and out of homelessness are often non-linear, involving cycles of housing loss, temporary stabilization, and renewed precarity shaped by structural constraints and available supports (Pophaim & Peacock, 2021). Recent research on housing system dynamics further demonstrates that movements across housing types are rarely linear and often involve repeated transitions between temporary, precarious, and institutional forms of accommodation, highlighting the limits of simplified housing continuum models (Wachsmuth *et al.*, 2024).

Canadian longitudinal evidence similarly shows that housing trajectories are heterogeneous over time, with some individuals achieving stability, others improving gradually, and others experiencing declining or persistently low housing stability (Aubry *et al.*, 2021). This body of work underscores the importance of dynamic, pathway-based analysis in understanding homelessness trajectories.

These insights have also shaped prevention strategies. By identifying patterns that precede housing loss, policymakers have sought to intervene earlier, particularly at moments when individuals are discharged from institutions such as hospitals, prisons, or child protection systems (Gaetz *et al.*, 2017; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). The focus on trajectories thus reflects a broader shift toward understanding homelessness as dynamic and preventable rather than inevitable (Gaetz, 2020). Recent Canadian scholarship further argues that preventing homelessness requires a systemic reorientation from crisis management toward upstream institutional reform, particularly in moments of discharge, policy handoffs, and intergovernmental coordination (Hughes, 2026). Contemporary prevention scholarship similarly emphasizes the importance of structural and systems-level interventions, arguing that effective prevention requires coordination across housing, health, income support, and justice systems rather than isolated crisis responses (Oudshoorn & Van Berkum, 2024).

Quebec research has extended the rupture framework by demonstrating that ruptures are not solely personal but may also be institutionally produced. Abrupt discharges—sometimes described as *sorties sèches*—from public institutions can create sudden housing loss when continuity of care or housing support is absent (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). In this sense, rupture becomes a lens through which systemic coordination failures are made visible (Smith, 2022).

However, rupture-based models implicitly assume prior residential stability. They therefore tend to reflect trajectories most commonly observed among Canadian-born populations, particularly single adults who experience homelessness following identifiable life crises (Grimard, 2011; Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025a). Enumeration tools such as shelter data and point-in-time counts are well suited to capturing these visible transitions, reinforcing the prominence of rupture within dominant analytical frameworks (Ali, 2018; Gouvernement du Québec, 2021).

Disaffiliation and social integration

Complementing rupture-based interpretations, the concept of **disaffiliation**, developed by Robert Castel, provides a broader sociological framework for understanding the gradual processes that precede social exclusion (Castel, 1995; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). Castel defines disaffiliation as the weakening of the two primary supports of social integration: stable employment and relational networks. Individuals move along a continuum from integration to vulnerability and, eventually, to exclusion when these supports erode (Castel, 1995).

In homelessness research, disaffiliation provides a bridge between structural and biographical explanations. It suggests that visible housing loss often reflects deeper processes of social disengagement that have unfolded over time. From this perspective, events such as eviction or institutional discharge are not isolated incidents but moments in which accumulated vulnerabilities become publicly visible (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). Quebec scholarship has mobilized this concept to frame homelessness as a trajectory marked by ruptures across institutional, relational, and economic domains (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

Importantly, disaffiliation does not imply complete isolation. Rather, it captures a progressive weakening of protective infrastructures that normally sustain social participation (Castel, 1995). This perspective has been particularly useful for understanding chronic homelessness, where long-term marginalization intersects with health, employment, and social vulnerabilities (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025a).

Structural processes and cumulative disadvantage

Alongside rupture and disaffiliation, a parallel body of literature emphasizes cumulative disadvantage as a driver of homelessness. Rather than focusing on singular events, this perspective highlights how multiple constraints—economic insecurity, discrimination, limited access to services, and unstable employment—interact over time to erode housing stability (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Shinn *et al.*, 1991).

Cumulative frameworks resonate with broader sociological analyses of inequality, suggesting that vulnerability is often produced through layered structural pressures rather than sudden crises (Clapham, 2003; Mallett *et al.*, 2005). Research on immigrant housing insecurity similarly highlights the multi-level nature of vulnerability, showing how individual constraints (income, language barriers), community resources, and broader policy environments interact to shape pathways into housing instability (Kaushik *et al.*, 2024). Housing pathways, from this perspective, are shaped by long-term interactions between individuals and institutional environments (Clapham, 2003; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024).

Recent Canadian research echoes this orientation by situating homelessness within systemic transformations, including labor precarity, welfare restructuring, and housing market pressures (OCPM, 2025). National statistical analyses show that individuals experiencing homelessness or severe housing insecurity in Canada are disproportionately affected by low income, unstable employment, and limited access to affordable housing (Uppal, 2022). Quebec scholarship similarly emphasizes that homelessness must be understood through structural determinants and institutional contexts shaping well-being and housing stability (Grimard *et al.*, 2024). Broader socio-economic transformations also shape housing vulnerability, as analyses of income distribution and social class dynamics in Quebec highlight persistent inequalities affecting access to stable housing and economic security (Boucher, 2025).

Such analyses underscore the importance of examining not only immediate triggers but also the structural contexts that make housing loss more likely (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021; Smith, 2022).

Hidden homelessness and the limits of measurement

Another major conceptual development concerns the recognition of hidden homelessness. Scholars increasingly argue that homelessness must be understood along a continuum that includes not only visible deprivation but also precarious living situations such as overcrowding, temporary arrangements, couch surfing, and unsafe housing (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020; Rodrigue, 2016). Hidden homelessness challenges measurement practices that rely heavily on shelter data. A recent scoping review confirms that hidden homelessness remains conceptually and methodologically underdeveloped, with inconsistent definitions and significant gaps in measurement across jurisdictions (Deleu *et al.*, 2023). Because many individuals avoid formal services, they remain statistically underrepresented despite experiencing significant housing insecurity (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020). Canadian estimates suggest that hidden homelessness may exceed visible homelessness in scale, pointing to the limits of enumeration tools (Ali, 2018; OCPM, 2025). Empirical research beyond major metropolitan centres further shows that hidden homelessness is often embedded in informal arrangements, overcrowding, and temporary stays with acquaintances, reinforcing the limits of shelter-based measurement tools (Kauppi *et al.*, 2017).

Although hidden homelessness is increasingly recognized as a significant component of housing insecurity, public and policy attention continues to focus primarily on its most visible manifestations. In Canada, homelessness is still commonly associated with street presence, emergency shelters, or encampments, partly because these forms are more readily observable and more easily captured through enumeration tools such as shelter statistics and point-in-time counts (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020). As a result, invisible forms of homelessness—such as temporary stays with friends or relatives, overcrowded housing, or unstable informal arrangements—tend to receive less attention in both research and policy debates, even though they may affect a large number of individuals experiencing housing precarity (Deleu *et al.*, 2023). This imbalance between visible and hidden forms of homelessness reinforces the importance of expanding analytical frameworks beyond public-space homelessness to better capture the full continuum of housing instability.

Structural, institutional, and spatial interpretations of homelessness

Recent literature increasingly situates homelessness within institutional and governance frameworks. Rather than attributing housing loss primarily to individual characteristics, scholars highlight the role of fragmented service systems, eligibility rules, and policy mismatches in shaping vulnerability (Smith, 2022; Smith & Kopec, 2023). From this perspective, homelessness emerges at the intersection of housing markets, social protection regimes, and administrative structures (Clapham, 2003). Architectural and urban planning research also highlights the spatial dimensions of homelessness, emphasizing how the design and governance of urban environments shape both the visibility of homelessness and the responses developed by institutions and communities (ASFQ *et al.*, 2023).

Canadian research underscores how shortages of affordable housing, combined with restrictive eligibility criteria for social housing and housing support programs, contribute to prolonged shelter stays and limited exits to stable housing (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b; OCPM, 2025; RAPSIM, 2025). Institutional coordination—or its absence—therefore becomes a central explanatory variable (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021; Smith, 2022). Recent Canadian analyses further emphasize that homelessness must be understood as the outcome of interacting structural systems—including housing markets, social policies, and service infrastructures—rather than solely as the result of individual circumstances (Buccieri *et al.*, 2022).

This structural orientation aligns with international scholarship emphasizing that homelessness is deeply embedded in broader political economies of housing (Clapham, 2003). Shinn and Khadduri (2020) similarly argue that homelessness is fundamentally structured by housing market dynamics and affordability constraints. As housing affordability declines across major cities, the boundary between housing insecurity and homelessness becomes increasingly porous (Nelson *et al.*, 2021; Smith & Kopec, 2023). International

research demonstrates that structural housing market pressures—including rising rents and declining access to affordable housing—play a central role in shaping homelessness trends (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017).

In the Montreal metropolitan context, public consultations and participatory research have documented growing tensions around the spatial management of homelessness, emphasizing how municipal planning, public space governance, and service distribution shape both the visibility and the lived experience of homelessness in the city (OPPL, 2026). Urban scholarship further shows how homelessness is experienced and negotiated through embodied and spatial practices, illustrating how urban design, surveillance, and spatial regulation influence where and how homeless bodies can exist in public space (Schmidt, 2025). Recent urban planning discussions in Quebec likewise underscore how homelessness increasingly intersects with the governance and design of public space, raising tensions around visibility, cohabitation, and the spatial management of vulnerability in cities (ASFQ, 2025). Climate-related risks are also increasingly discussed as compounding vulnerabilities among people experiencing homelessness, shaping exposure, health risks, and service demand (Kidd, 2022). Recent scholarship proposes structured response frameworks for integrating climate adaptation into homelessness policy, emphasizing coordinated planning, risk mitigation, and system-level preparedness to address escalating environmental exposures (Kidd *et al.*, 2023).

Migrant homelessness within conceptual frameworks

Although many foundational concepts were developed through studies of domestic populations, recent research has begun to examine how they apply to migrants and refugees in Canada. A growing body of Canadian scholarship documents that newcomers face distinctive housing barriers related to income constraints, discrimination, limited credit history, and unfamiliarity with local housing systems (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Policy-oriented research also highlights how gaps between immigration policy, housing systems, and social protection frameworks can exacerbate housing instability among newcomers (Springer *et al.*, 2013). Earlier Canadian research already identified recent immigrants as a population facing heightened risk of housing instability due to labour market barriers and difficulties accessing affordable housing in major metropolitan areas (Preston *et al.*, 2009). Earlier practice-based research on immigrant homelessness in Canada also observed that newcomers frequently encounter difficulties navigating homelessness and settlement services, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with institutional systems, and limited availability of culturally adapted support programs (SCPI, 2003). Recent research in Quebec similarly highlights how language barriers, limited access to interpretation services, and unfamiliarity with institutional procedures can significantly hinder immigrants' ability to access health and social services, reinforcing structural barriers to support systems (SHERPA, 2024). Sectoral reports further document structural vulnerabilities in the Canadian housing sector, including barriers related to documentation requirements, landlord screening practices, and limited access to affordable units (Preisler, 2021).

Studies also note that migrant homelessness frequently involves families and women, populations historically less visible within homelessness research (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). These demographic patterns challenge models derived primarily from single-adult shelter populations (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025b).

Importantly, researchers emphasize that housing is central to successful settlement and broader integration processes, as access to stable housing supports employment, social participation, and long-term inclusion in host societies (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Samari & Groot, 2023). Research also shows that housing instability among refugees is closely intertwined with health outcomes, as precarious housing conditions can exacerbate stress, limit access to care, and undermine long-term settlement and well-being (Kaur *et al.*, 2021). Earlier Canadian scholarship has already highlighted the interdependence between immigrant settlement, health, housing, and homelessness, emphasizing that adequate housing supports health while declining health and social exclusion can increase the risk of housing instability and homelessness among newcomers (Newbold, 2010).

While rupture remains relevant in some cases—particularly where displacement or migration itself constitutes a destabilizing event—scholars increasingly point to gradual processes of housing insecurity that unfold across reception, settlement, and post-recognition phases (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; ÉRIQA, 2024; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). These observations have prompted calls for conceptual models capable of capturing temporal complexity and institutional dynamics (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022). Work on service navigation also notes the growing relevance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital networks in how people experiencing homelessness seek help, maintain ties, and access resources (Barman-Adhikari *et al.*, 2018; OCPM, 2025). Earlier policy research also highlighted the potential of social media and digital platforms to facilitate inclusion, service access, and information sharing among marginalized populations, including those experiencing homelessness (Taylor, 2011).

Toward integrated conceptualizations

Taken together, the literature presents homelessness as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by life events, cumulative processes, social integration, and institutional contexts (Clapham, 2003; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). Quebec scholarship likewise stresses the complexity and heterogeneity of homelessness trajectories, warning against overly simplified problem—solution narratives that obscure the structural and institutional dynamics shaping housing precarity (Grimard, 2022). Rupture-based models illuminate pathways characterized by sudden housing loss, while disaffiliation and cumulative frameworks foreground longer-term structural vulnerabilities (Aubry *et al.*, 2013; Castel, 1995). The continuum model expands the analytical lens to include hidden and at-risk populations, challenging visibility-based definitions (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020). International scholarship has similarly emphasized the conceptual ambiguity surrounding hidden homelessness and the need for greater definitional clarity (Deleu *et al.*, 2023).

Within the Canadian context, these conceptual tools have primarily been applied to domestic homelessness but are increasingly mobilized to understand migrant experiences (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). The growing recognition of institutional factors, governance fragmentation, and housing market pressures suggests an ongoing shift toward more structural interpretations of homelessness (OCPM, 2025; Smith, 2022; Smith & Kopec, 2023). As research continues to evolve, these conceptual traditions provide the foundation for examining how different populations encounter housing instability and how homelessness is framed within policy and scholarly discourse (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016; Gouvernement du Québec, 2021).

Against this backdrop, these conceptual traditions have largely shaped how homelessness has been interpreted in Canada and other high-income contexts. In particular, the lenses of rupture, which emphasizes critical life events leading to housing loss and disaffiliation, which highlights the gradual erosion of social integration, have become central frameworks for understanding domestic homelessness trajectories. Yet these models were primarily developed through research on Canadian-born populations whose housing instability often emerges after identifiable moments of residential disruption. As a result, they may only partially capture the dynamics of homelessness among migrants and asylum seekers, whose trajectories frequently unfold through prolonged housing insecurity, institutional fragmentation, and limited access to stabilizing supports upon arrival.

This limitation motivates the conceptual framework developed in this study. Rather than abandoning rupture and disaffiliation, the framework revisits these foundational lenses in order to examine how they illuminate—and where they fail to capture—the processes through which migrant homelessness emerges in contemporary urban contexts (Gaetz *et al.*, 2016).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From rupture and disaffiliation in domestic homelessness to institutional erosion and non-anchoring in migrant homelessness

Research on homelessness in Canada has long been shaped by event-based accounts of how people “enter” homelessness, often emphasizing identifiable moments of rupture that precipitate a sudden break from housing stability. In this tradition, homelessness is commonly narrated as a trajectory that begins from a position of relative residential attachment and then shifts abruptly following a critical life event such as eviction, relationship dissolution, job loss, an acute health crisis, or discharge from an institution (Johnson *et al.*, 2008; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). Housing pathways scholarship similarly underscores the role of turning points and disruptions in producing transitions between housing states, conceptualizing homelessness as one possible outcome of events that interrupt otherwise continuous trajectories (Clapham, 2003). This conceptual orientation has been influential not only analytically but also politically: it provides a compelling narrative of causality, makes homelessness legible to enumeration systems that privilege visible crises, and aligns well with policy instruments that seek to “prevent” homelessness by intervening before or at the rupture (Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Gaetz *et al.*, 2013).

Quebec research has both adopted and reframed this rupture lens by emphasizing that ruptures are not only biographical or interpersonal but can be institutionally produced. In *L'itinérance au Québec: réalités, ruptures et citoyenneté*, homelessness is interpreted as a process punctuated by cumulative ruptures across housing, employment, health, and service systems, including “sorties sèches” from institutions that transfer people into precarity without continuity of care or housing support (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). In this sense, rupture is not simply a misfortune that befalls individuals; it can signal systemic failures of coordination and responsibility. This institutional reading of rupture is critical because it links trajectories to governance and to the organization of public systems, shifting explanatory weight away from individual pathology and toward structural and institutional conditions (MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; Smith, 2022)

Rupture-based models also interact closely with the concept of disaffiliation, most strongly associated with Robert Castel's theorization of social exclusion as a gradual weakening of the two major supports of social integration: stable employment and relational networks (Castel, 1995). Disaffiliation is not a sudden event but a progressive movement along a continuum from integration to vulnerability and, under intensified constraints, toward exclusion. Within homelessness research, this concept helps connect sudden moments of housing loss to deeper processes that have been unfolding over time. From this perspective, visible homelessness often appears as the point at which accumulated vulnerabilities become manifest: an eviction, breakup, or institutional discharge can be understood as the event through which disaffiliation becomes publicly legible (Castel, 1995; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024). This pairing—rupture as event, disaffiliation as process—has been particularly effective for interpreting many Canadian-born homelessness trajectories, where housing loss is often preceded by weakening ties to employment, services, and networks and followed by recurrent cycling through shelters or public spaces (Housing Infrastructure and Communities - Canada, 2025a).

The migrant homelessness literature increasingly suggests that rupture-centered models do not fully capture how housing instability is produced for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. A major reason is that rupture models presume a meaningful “before” in the context of arrival: they rely on the idea that people fall out of housing stability. For many migrants, and especially for asylum seekers, the Canadian “before” is absent. Housing precarity can begin immediately upon entry, before residential anchoring is established, as newcomers move through reception infrastructures that were not designed to ensure continuity of housing in an extremely constrained rental market (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025). Empirical research shows that migrants often do not identify a single moment when they “became homeless”; rather, they describe progressive overcrowding, serial temporary arrangements, dependence on informal networks, and a gradual narrowing of options as administrative timelines, eligibility rules, and market barriers accumulate (Forchuk *et al.*, 2022; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). This pattern aligns with broader

findings on cumulative disadvantage, in which multiple constraints compound over time to produce housing loss not as a discrete event but as a slow shift into instability (Shinn *et al.*, 1991).

This project therefore proposes a conceptual framework that treats rupture and disaffiliation as the baseline lens through which local homelessness has been made intelligible, while using migrant homelessness to expose the limits of event-based narratives and to motivate a process-based alternative. The first step is not to abandon rupture, but to use it as a conceptual mirror. Rupture remains analytically valuable because it clarifies how dominant models of homelessness are calibrated to trajectories that pass through visible thresholds—eviction into shelter use, discharge into street exposure—and because these thresholds are precisely what most measurement tools capture (Ali, 2018; Gaetz *et al.*, 2013). Migrant homelessness, by contrast, often unfolds through housing insecurity that remains partially privatized and statistically obscured, which means that the absence of rupture may itself be a finding: the trajectory does not become legible to systems built around visible breaks (Ali, 2018; Walsh *et al.*, 2016).

To account for this, the framework introduces three process-based concepts that together better reflect migrant trajectories: institutional desynchronization, erosion, and institutional non-anchoring.

Institutional desynchronization refers to the temporal mismatch between immigration governance, social protection timelines, and housing market access. In Montreal and Québec, migrants move through systems governed by different policy logics—border and admissibility processes, provincial reception and triage, municipal emergency responses, and the private rental market—whose timelines do not align with one another (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Smith, 2022). Work authorization delays, documentation timelines, eligibility constraints for supports, and shelter rules may compress time at precisely the moment when the housing market requires stable income, references, credit history, and documentation. The result is not a single rupture but an administratively produced condition of prolonged exposure to housing risk (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025)

Erosion names the mechanism through which this exposure becomes homelessness. Instead of a sudden fall, erosion describes a gradual weakening of housing stability through repeated minor displacements: a short stay in a reception setting, then a shelter or hotel placement, then an overcrowded apartment, then a temporary sublet, then a return to emergency accommodation. Each step may appear manageable in isolation, but together they produce cumulative housing insecurity that becomes normalized. Recent research on housing system dynamics further demonstrates that movements across housing types are rarely linear and often involve repeated transitions between temporary, precarious, and institutional forms of accommodation, highlighting the limits of simplified housing continuum models (Wachsmuth *et al.*, 2024). The erosion model is consistent with pathway perspectives that emphasize housing as dynamic and relational rather than static and binary, while shifting attention away from discrete turning points toward the incremental processes through which markets, institutions, and networks interact (Clapham, 2003; Walsh *et al.*, 2016). Erosion also helps interpret why migrant homelessness is often “hidden”: the trajectory remains within semi-private spaces—crowded units, informal arrangements, serial short-term stays—and therefore avoids the public visibility that would trigger recognition and intervention (Ali, 2018; Gravel, 2020).

Institutional non-anchoring provides a conceptual summary of what distinguishes migrant homelessness from local homelessness when analyzed through rupture and disaffiliation. Non-anchoring refers to a condition in which individuals are present in the city yet not stabilized by the infrastructures that typically secure housing continuity. Migrants may have social ties, community networks, and strong motivations for settlement, but remain insufficiently anchored institutionally because their rights, eligibility, and access to stabilizing supports are partial, delayed, or fragmented (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Smith, 2022). Earlier practice-based research on immigrant homelessness in Canada also observed that newcomers frequently encounter difficulties navigating homelessness and settlement services, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with institutional systems, and limited availability of culturally adapted support programs (SCPI, 2003). Recent research in Quebec similarly highlights how language barriers, limited access to interpretation services, and unfamiliarity with institutional procedures can significantly

hinder immigrants' ability to access health and social services, reinforcing structural barriers to support systems (SHERPA, 2024). These institutional barriers also help clarify how disaffiliation operates differently for migrants. Castel's formulation emphasizes the weakening of employment and relational supports; yet migrants may maintain robust relationships while being effectively excluded from institutional pathways to housing security. In this sense, migrant homelessness can be understood as a form of institutional or statutory disaffiliation: not the erosion of social ties per se, but the failure of institutions to convert legal presence or protection into material housing stability (Castel, 1995; Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025).

This reframing becomes particularly important when considering refugee recognition. While recognition is legally transformative, the literature shows that it does not automatically constitute a housing transition. Instead, it can function as a secondary critical juncture that reconfigures risk: asylum-specific supports may be withdrawn as expectations of self-sufficiency increase, even while barriers persist (insufficient income relative to rents, discrimination, lack of credit history, and scarcity of family-sized units) (de la Calzada-Calugay & Hanley, 2024; Forchuk *et al.*, 2022). The framework therefore treats recognition not as an endpoint but as a point at which erosion may intensify, pushing households from institutional visibility (shelters, hotels) into hidden homelessness (overcrowding, informal arrangements) as the system assumes vulnerability has been resolved (Hanley & Bourdeau, 2025; Walsh *et al.*, 2016).

In sum, the conceptual framework is built as a deliberate contrast. For Canadian-born homelessness, the dominant explanatory pairing is rupture and disaffiliation: homelessness becomes visible through identifiable breaks that crystallize longer-term weakening of employment and relational supports (Castel, 1995; MacDonald *et al.*, 2024; Shinn *et al.*, 1991). For migrant homelessness, the framework proposes that the more accurate pairing is institutional desynchronization and erosion, culminating in institutional non-anchoring and hidden homelessness. This does not deny that migrants experience trauma, loss, or displacement; rather, it specifies that within the host-city context, homelessness is often produced through the misalignment of systems and timelines more than through a single precipitating event. The analytic payoff is substantial: by using rupture as a reference model and demonstrating its limits for migrant trajectories, the framework positions migrant homelessness not as a marginal variant of homelessness, but as a case that reveals how homelessness is made (in)visible by institutions, measures, and governance.

4. METHODS

This study employed standard social science practice, specifically that of qualitative social science research. Data collection was carried out through an initial review of the literature on homelessness and homelessness as experienced by migrants with a focus on the City of Montreal, followed by a set of interviews with stakeholders in the field. Detailed statistical data were not required to demonstrate, for example, that homelessness was a significant problem in Montreal. All are in agreement that this problem is significant, some calling it a crisis. The new city administration, elected in November of 2025, has given homelessness a high priority with considerable funds earmarked to address it.

The literature review revealed that, although there is a very significant amount of research on homelessness in general and a similarly large amount of research on immigration and immigrant integration, there is scant literature on migrant homelessness. This research project sought to provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon by gaining insights from the interviews and focus groups. In the opinion of the research team, qualitative research methods were more fruitful in producing useful insights than purely statistical work would have been. This raises to question of what use the research team was planning for the insights and why qualitative findings would be of greater utility than quantitative. As with most applied research, the ultimate objective was to produce viable recommendations for how the problem of migrant homelessness in Montreal can be mitigated. Given that the large scale of this problem is relatively new, there is only a limited understanding of it to date. The research team was seeking to learn how it was that some migrants fell into homelessness, how they used or navigated the city to find housing and the wherewithal to pay for it, the utility of the social services that they could appeal to, and the supportive roles played by networks of family, friends, co-ethnics, other migrants, and other homeless persons. Statistical studies are able to furnish valuable information about the scale of a problem such as homelessness, but statistics alone cannot offer the nuance and insights that only qualitative methods can provide. A study such as this one, in seeking to learn how homeless migrants arrived at their condition of homelessness, how they navigate the city's spaces to find adequate shelter and other necessities of life, and how they are served by community institutions and resources, must rely on qualitative research methods.

Analysing the findings was done through applying both standard qualitative research tools but with the addition of applying principles of architecture and urban design, a hallmark of the Liquid Space Lab. The research team looked at how homeless migrants navigated the geography of the city, used its public spaces, its institutions, and the built environment, and how they gained information about each of these. The researchers synthesized the information gained, drew conclusions, and formed recommendations for government agencies, non-governmental service providers, and for future research.

Some working assumptions

As mentioned above, we understand the concept of 'homelessness' broadly to include not only those who are completely lacking shelter and are living on the streets but those whose accommodations are substandard to the point of being unsafe, prone to violence, unhealthy, or overcrowded. We also consider those whose accommodations are highly precarious such as relying on "couch surfing" with friends, relatives, neighbours, or strangers, short term such as at emergency shelters to be homeless. For the purposes of this study, the concept of homelessness is not restricted to persons being entirely without shelter and forced to live on the streets. Those living in tent encampments are also considered to be homeless given the ultimate unviability of this type of housing.

The concept of 'migrant' is also interpreted broadly in this study. Our use of this term includes those in Canada with a permanent residency visa such as those who entered as skilled workers, provincial nominees, members of the family class, refugees, and those whose temporary visas were converted to permanent residency through the Canadian Experience Class. We use the term 'migrant' to cover also those who are legally resident with a temporary residency visa such as for work, for study, or for long term but temporary family reunification, formal asylum seekers, as well as for those lacking formal documentation.

Moreover, the term is used by many authors and organizations active in the field of migrant homelessness and who may benefit from this research.

Liquid Space Lab chose to study the situation of migrant homelessness in Montreal for two principal reasons. First is that Montreal had experienced a significant flow of migrants since the days when the Roxham Road border post became a major entry point for migrants arriving from the United States, with most of those arriving through that port of entry travelling onward to Montreal. Although this port of entry has been closed, Montreal remains a preferred destination for migrants owing to its already large population, the potential for work, the presence of co-ethnics or co-nationals, and a strong network of service-providers. The second reason is straightforward: Liquid Space Lab is based in Montreal which meant that the costs of carrying out such a study would be lower than if the research team was required to travel to other cities. In the considered opinion of the research team, no other city in Canada experiencing migrant homelessness offered advantages over Montreal as a research subject.

The main components of the research

The literature review was conducted by a post-doctoral fellow with contributions by Liquid Space Lab officials. The full results of the literature review, which included a review of related statistics, appears above in section 2 of this report. These results confirmed LSL's expectations that there is comparatively little research literature available on the phenomenon of migrant homelessness despite its growing prevalence. This lack of existing literature warranted conducting fieldwork on the issue.

The fieldwork took the form of interviews or focus groups with the following categories of stakeholders:

- Government officials
- Officials of non-governmental service-providing organizations
- Officials of advocacy organizations
- Interlocutors from academia
- Individual migrants who may have experienced homelessness

The original plans for the interviews included speaking with neighbours in areas with significant numbers of migrant homeless persons, possibly including tent encampments. These interviews proved difficult to carry out due to migrants' residential instability and to the fact that they don't occupy any specific neighborhoods or encampments. In addition, the number of individual migrants interviewed was lower than planned owing to challenges in making contact with such individuals. Originally, LSL had expected that leads to making contact with homeless migrants would be from service-providing organizations. Unfortunately, only one was willing to provide us with the required introductions. One homeless person, a Canadian, considered providing some contacts but finally decided against doing so. Organizations were concerned about the privacy of the individuals, creating fear that participation with the research project could lead to deportation, and a general unease about facilitating individual interviews. Assurances by LSL that interviewees' privacy would be protected and that all reports would be anonymized were to no avail.

The research team also experienced a considerable reluctance on the part of some non-governmental organizations serving either the homeless or newcomers to speak with us. The reasons for this varied and included their heavy caseloads at the time, the high number of requests for interviews that had been made by social science researchers in general, and concerns over privacy. The past twenty-five years has seen a strong growth in the attention that social scientists have paid to both homelessness and to immigration and immigrant integration. In Montreal alone, there are many university programs in these fields of study, including at the graduate level, each of which has both students and professors actively researching these phenomena. Service providers are very busy with their caseloads and have expressed frustration at the number of researchers who want their time.

Throughout the research project, while the CMHC Contribution Agreement did not require formal institutional ethics approval, it explicitly required that all research involving human participants be conducted in accordance with the core principles of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) (Government of Canada, 2022). In line with this requirement, the Liquid Space Lab team adhered to these principles—respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice—by implementing appropriate protocols for informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. In addition, we sought guidance from our institutional and community partners to ensure that the research approach was appropriate to the specific vulnerabilities associated with migrant homelessness. These partners contributed to the review of interview and focus group protocols, and all participants were provided with informed consent forms, also validated through this collaborative process.

The interview and focus group guidelines and the consent forms appear in Appendix 1.

In total, 17 interviews and 3 focus groups were conducted, with 36 participants (14 locals and 22 homeless migrants). Furthermore, 5 interviews were declined, and 5 potential interviewees never answered. The tables below summarize the status of participant recruitment and data collection.

Realized interviews & focus groups (N19 – 35 participants: 13 locals, 22 homeless migrants)

Number	Type of organisation	Interlocutor
3 interviews	Homelessness support and emergency shelter organizations	Officials
5 interviews	Migrant reception, settlement, and integration organizations	Officials
1 interview	Feminist community advocacy organization	Officials
1 interview	Homelessness prevention policy collective	Official
1 interview	Professional NGO in architecture and humanitarian action	Project manager
1 interview	University professor	Professor
2 interviews	City of Montreal	Ex borough mayor Director and expert in homelessness
3 interviews	Homeless migrants	Homeless migrant
3 focus groups	Homeless migrants	10 HM women 6 HM women 3 HM men

No answer (N5)

Number	Type of organisation	Interlocutor
1 interview	Homelessness support and emergency shelter organization	Official
3 interviews	Migrant reception, settlement, and integration organizations	Officials
1 interview	Neighborhood table	Coordinator

Declined interviews (N5)

Number	Type of organisation	Interlocutor
1 interview	Homelessness support and emergency shelter organization	Official
1 interview	Social inequality research organization	Researcher
1 interview	Research centre on immigration	Researcher
1 interview	Regional homelessness umbrella organization	Official
1 interview	Homeless person (Canadian)	Homeless Canadian

The analysis of their contents followed the stated objectives of the research and appear in section 5 below. Again, the analyses included how migrants navigated the geography of the city, its public spaces, the locations of its services, the locations of housing, where information pertinent to acquiring the necessities of life could be found, and where they could meet others and establish supportive networks.

Recommendations flowed from the analyses but were guided by parameters of feasibility. The recommendations offered in this report are intended to be feasible and directly capable of mitigating the problem of homelessness experienced by migrants in Montreal. These recommendations are vetted through meetings with stakeholders, which emphasize feasibility.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study principally arises from the challenge of achieving the intended number of interviews with individual migrants as well as with individuals in the neighbourhoods where homeless migrant persons congregate.

The original research design included a photovoice component intended to document spatial trajectories through participant-generated imagery. However, direct access to migrants experiencing homelessness proved more limited than anticipated. Participants who agreed to be interviewed preferred to meet in organizational or institutional settings they perceived as safe. Also, the team became concerned that this method would appear invasive. Given these constraints, we decided not to implement the photovoice method in order to avoid creating additional barriers to participation. Instead, the spatial dimension of trajectories was reconstructed through interview narratives and subsequently synthesized into an aggregated spatial map. This approach ensured participant confidentiality while still allowing for territorial analysis.

5. RESULTS

As a reminder, the results aim to answer the following questions: What drives migrants into homelessness, and what are their spatial trajectories? What resources (formal and informal) do homeless migrants utilize, and how effective are these in meeting their housing and other needs? How do existing housing support systems (governmental, community-based, and informal networks) help or hinder migrants in finding stable housing? How does migrant homelessness differ from local/domestic homelessness?

5.1 The road that leads to the homelessness of migrants and their spatial trajectories

This section maps the spatial movements of homeless migrants to understand how they navigate urban spaces and temporary housing. By mapping their movements in the city, the section helps understand the drivers that push migrants into homelessness.

“Sans expérience, pas d’emploi ; sans emploi, pas d’expérience.”

Structural Drivers of Migrant Homelessness

Our findings indicate that migrant homelessness in Montreal is primarily driven by structural, institutional, and policy-related factors rather than individual characteristics. Despite a decline in the number of asylum seekers, migrants are increasingly experiencing residential instability and homelessness, reflecting a broader transformation in the profile of homelessness. Economic recession, rising housing costs, and limited or insufficient services in situations of residential instability all contribute to this trend.

Upon arrival, many migrants enter Montreal without any residential anchoring in a rental market that informally excludes those without guarantors, credit histories, savings, permanent status, or established local networks—often while supporting children.

Participants consistently highlighted the stagnation of government hosting and housing policies for migrants, which have remained largely unchanged for over twenty years despite major transformations in migration pathways, housing markets, and socio-economic conditions. Migrants encounter a system that is complex, fragmented, and poorly adapted to their realities, leaving many in prolonged precarity. Legal and institutional barriers, administrative heaviness, and delays in immigration processes further restrict access to employment, housing, and support services. Diplomas and professional training obtained abroad are often not recognized, making formal labour market entry extremely difficult.

Legal status plays a central role in structuring vulnerability. Asylum seekers applying inland, migrants excluded under the Safe Third Country Agreement, individuals in irregular situations, international students in legal limbo, and temporary workers with an expired visa face significant barriers to accessing housing and services. Many newcomers arrive without adequate information about asylum procedures or deadlines, leading to missed opportunities for protection. Administrative delays prolong uncertainty and defer access to work permits, social assistance, and stable income. For those without status, no formal safety net exists.

Housing and employment function as major vectors of exploitation. Migrants face persistent challenges in securing accommodation or work and are frequently exposed to labour exploitation. Discrimination in rental markets is widespread, including refusal to rent to families with children, illegal deposit requirements, and exclusion based on race or immigration status. Without guarantors, credit histories, or financial security, many migrants are pushed into informal and exploitative housing arrangements, including overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at inflated costs. Fear related to precarious

legal status, limited knowledge of rights, and language barriers further reduces migrants' ability to challenge abusive practices. These conditions often result in forms of invisible homelessness characterized by instability and insalubrious housing conditions rather than street presence.

With regard to employment, in the majority of instances, migrants must possess local experience in order to secure a job. They become ensnared in a self-perpetuating cycle, wherein the absence of local experience inhibits them from attaining decent employment, which would otherwise enable them to build a professional work history in Quebec. **Only in rare instances do employers from outside Montreal, where labor shortages are pronounced, engage with community organizations to offer short-term employment opportunities, a practice that merits formal institutionalization.**

The Story of Othman and Amine

Even though they met at the NGO that is supporting them and that allowed us to interview them, Othman and Amine have a very similar story. They are both originally from Morocco, they both immigrated with their families, and they both came with tourist visas, with the deceitful information that they can find a job as soon as they are in Montreal and turn their tourist visa into a work visa, leading in turn to a permanent residency status. The reason for immigrating for both men was to offer a better future and more opportunities to their children.

They both came with a small amount of money, almost CAD\$10,000, stayed at a hotel and started their search for a job. They didn't have any social connections in Montreal.

Othman was a refrigeration technician in Morocco. Following some investigations, it was clear to him that he will not find opportunities in the same field of expertise. He also understood how challenging it was for him to find a job in any field without Québec work experience. His money and his expectations decreased simultaneously. Two weeks stay at the hotel drained his savings. He was with very little money with a temporary status and jobless. At the mosque that he occasionally visited, he met a fellow countryman who is originally from the same city in Morocco. He helped him renting an affordable small apartment owned by an old Moroccan woman, without a guarantor or credit history, renting a house would have been more complicated. The rent was 1000\$ per month, which was hardly sustainable for him.

When he understood it was the only solution if he wanted to stay in Canada, he applied for asylum. With his social security number that he received 8 long months following his arrival (along with his status as asylum seeker), he was able to get a formal job instead of doing undeclared work. The only job that he could find was as a delivery agent. He considered to attend a training session in refrigeration to work in his field of expertise. But becoming a student means that he would have to get a study visa and lose his status of asylum seeker and the social aid that comes with it. With the salary he earned, he could hardly pay the rent and minimally sustain his family. For food, he would rely on food banks. For other necessities like furniture and clothing, a humanitarian organization supporting migrants helped him. His children are young adults and needed to attend to Cégep and university (the tuition fees are almost 15,000\$ per year), but he couldn't afford it. Education was very important to him, so he decided to send his family back to Morocco while he stayed in Montreal. He now rents a one-space apartment that he shares with two other co-workers.

As for Amine, after spending a few days at the hotel, he moved in a substandard and overcrowded one bedroom apartment—all the family slept together on mattresses on the floor—in which he replaced a young Moroccan he had accidentally met in the street. The rent was high, but he accepted due to the owner's promise that he would upgrade the apartment. But months had past, and no works have been done to improve the conditions of the dwelling. Amine owned a restaurant and was a cook in Morocco. He faced the similar difficulties in finding a decent job. He started to apply in restaurants and hotels, but no doors would open since he didn't have any local experience. He is now living on social aid, an amount that he started to receive after he got his status as asylum seeker. His children are aged 6 and 9, therefore they could go to school because it's free. His wife started French lessons (francisation) and would do volunteering in the

organization that supports them, but then, due to all the stress the family had been undergoing and the precarious living conditions, she had a nervous breakdown.

Both men are doing all they can to succeed in starting a new and decent life, but systematic challenges prevent them from doing so. Their previous training and work experience are not recognized in Canada. They only get scarce and poor work opportunities that prevent them from attending their families' basic needs. They cannot study because a change of status would prevent them in getting social aid. Life is expensive and rent is high. They are not on the streets, but their housing conditions are obviously described as invisible homelessness. They didn't get the chance to create a social network. They only have one another. The only activities they do aside from work and search for a job is taking the bus to the downtown of Montreal and wandering in the streets and going to Tim Horton for coffee and a cigarette. They were ashamed to tell their story, embarrassed by their legal status and their life condition in general.

A trajectory marked by power imbalance, shame, and uncertainty

Evidence indicates that migrant homelessness is shaped by forms of forced displacement that precede arrival. Experiences of political persecution, organized crime, extortion, family coercion, and gender-based violence often compel rapid departures, leaving little opportunity to plan for stable housing upon arrival. These pressures are frequently compounded by administrative disruption across migration pathways, including sudden loss of status in transit countries, missed or misunderstood immigration procedures, and delayed permits. Such processes generate repeated interruptions to settlement and prolong residential instability.

Thus, for many migrants, **the pathway into homelessness appears structurally patterned, shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities rather than sudden rupture.** In fact, many newcomers arrive without a residential anchor, financial resources, or local networks, making homelessness an initial condition of settlement. Their migration journeys may already involve financial depletion, debt, exposure to danger, and prolonged instability. Their trajectories are marked by power imbalances—prior and after migration—linked to precarious legal status, economic dependency, and social isolation. These conditions increase exposure to exploitation, domestic violence, threats, and sexual harassment, especially for women.

Participants described significant physical and psychological distress resulting from prolonged uncertainty, instability, and anxiety. Many experience a profound loss of dignity associated with their housing, employment, and financial conditions, particularly in comparison with their lives prior to migration. Feelings of shame often accompany their legal status, their social position, and their reliance on support systems.

Social isolation is a key factor shaping and intensifying migrants' vulnerability. At the same time, some support initiatives can partially mitigate these effects. For example, the model developed by the Welcome Collective, an organization whose mission is to support the dignified reception and integration of refugees and newcomers by mobilizing local communities, fosters a sense of dignity and belonging by encouraging migrants to support one another through listening, mutual aid, hosting, and shared experience. Through these practices, migrants gradually form their own support networks in the absence of broader social infrastructure.

Habiba's story

Habiba rests her forehead on the table and weeps silently. Deeply hurt and disillusioned by the world, she withdraws inward, seeking refuge within herself. Hers is one story among many—stories of those who see Canada as a safe haven, only to be let down by a system that offers them little to no chance. At 27 years old, she loses her father and becomes an easy prey to trade for her paternal uncles. They want to force her into marriage, while she wishes to attend school and become a dentist. Encouraged by members of her extended family in Quebec, who promise to house her and help her with her studies if she comes to live with them, she uses her mother's last savings to flee to Canada. From the very first days, she is assigned household chores and asked to care for a young cousin with a disability. Months go by, but Habiba does not forget her dream of returning to school. When she expresses her desire and reminds her host family of their promise, they threaten her with being thrown out and inform that she has no legal status and would be forcibly returned to her country by law enforcement. Her persistence and refusal to be exploited ultimately lead her to the streets. An elderly neighbor with whom she occasionally spoke takes pity on her and drives her to PRAIDA. She is denied access—only people who apply for asylum upon their arrival are hosted at PRAIDA, a fact she never knew—and referred instead to an organization that offers her legal advice and support. They temporarily shelter her in a center for former detainees, a place she describes as unsanitary, unsafe, and anxiety-inducing. After a short period of alternating between the center (21 days) and the organization (3 days) where she sleeps in the manager's office, she once again finds herself homeless and without any recourse—without a social security number, the doors of the shelters for asylum seekers are closed to her, so are the organizations that support homeless persons. With the support and guidance of the organization that she was referred to, she starts her application for asylum. But she is informed that the process will be very complicated and long because it's her 11th month in Montreal. She can difficultly communicate in French. She cannot support herself because she doesn't have a work permit and even if she had one, without training or experience, her chances if integrating the job market are very limited. Montreal's harsh winter has started. She is alone, penniless, and without any hope of finding a way out of the desperate situation in which she finds herself.

Habiba's story is not unique. It reveals several recurring patterns that characterize trajectories into migrant's homelessness. The first pattern is disconnection and misinformation. Newcomers often lack a support network and are unaware of the laws and regulations governing their legal status and their opportunities. Many view Canada as an ideal host country and are unprepared for the realities they encounter. The second pattern concerns the rigidity of the system and the ways in which it contributes to increased migrant vulnerability. Administrative processes related to migrants' applications are lengthy, and during this period individuals receive very limited support for housing and have little chance of securing employment. The following section analyzes the drivers of migrant homelessness, the resources and support systems available to migrants, and the key distinctions between migrant and domestic homelessness trajectories. These findings are intended to inform decision-makers and contribute to the development of more responsive and effective policy and program interventions.

Spatial trajectories and urban navigation

The spatial trajectories of migrants experiencing homelessness are characterized by **mobility, fragmentation, and temporariness rather than prolonged street dwelling**. Their spatial pathways frequently follow an institutional corridor linking entry points, emergency shelters, and short-term reception programs before dispersing into more affordable peripheral neighbourhoods. In addition to frequent intra-urban displacement, certain urban transit infrastructures—such as bus terminals or administrative addresses associated with migration procedures—may function as temporary spatial anchors, despite not being intended for habitation.

Their use of the city is often confined to accessible locations, including downtown areas, parks, shopping centres, Tim Hortons, and places of worship, which often provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. Access to public transportation is irregular, further limiting mobility. Migrants navigate the city under significant constraints shaped by limited social networks, language barriers, and financial precarity. These factors restrict their ability to move freely and meaningfully use urban space, resulting in a pattern of selective and limited spatial engagement rather than full participation in city life.

Upon arrival, many migrants experience confusion, long waiting periods, and limited organizational presence at entry points such as airports. Short-term institutional accommodations, particularly through PRAIDA, a Quebec government organization that provides initial reception, temporary accommodation, and support services to asylum seekers, often constitute an initial point of contact. However, the organization's strict eligibility criteria and time limits mean that migrants must quickly transition to other temporary arrangements. These include volunteer hosting through community organizations, couch surfing, rotating stays in women's centres, or overcrowded shared housing.

This pattern of repeated displacement produces what participants described as forced urban nomadism. Migrants may move between multiple residences—sometimes eight or nine different accommodations within a single month—resulting in continuous instability. Their repetitive displacements further increase precarity, as some asylum seekers without a permanent address may not receive correspondence from the Immigration and Refugee board of Canada, leading their claim to be considered abandoned and therefore rejected. Limited access to storage for personal belongings further intensifies this condition. The use of encampments has not been confirmed. However, it appears unlikely for many migrants, particularly those who arrive with families and who, consequently, lack agility. Moreover, access to camps often requires prior connections or established social ties that migrants frequently lack.

Overall, migrants' spatial experiences are defined by short-term institutional stays, informal arrangements, and restricted urban mobility, producing fragmented and precarious forms of inhabiting the city.

Figure 2 presents an aggregated visualization of spatial trajectories reconstructed from interview data. Although individual experiences varied, trajectories frequently reflected a recurrent institutional sequence: arrival at Montréal–Trudeau Airport, referral to provincial reception infrastructure (PRAIDA), temporary accommodation placements, and subsequent circulation among clustered support organizations in central Montreal. Rather than diffuse mobility across the city, the map reveals structured circulation between a limited number of institutional nodes. These movements reflect the organization of service provision rather than individual preference.

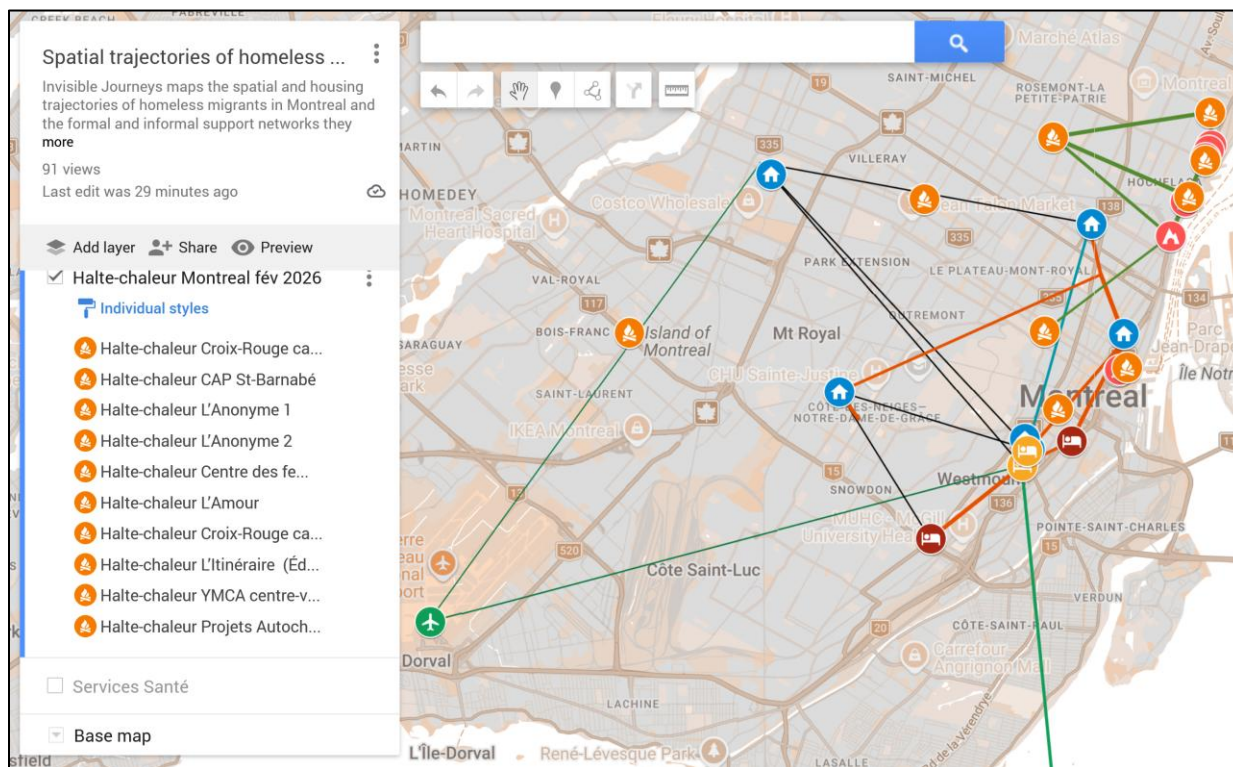


Figure 2. Illustrative Spatial Trajectories of Migrants Experiencing Housing Instability in Montréal

A working interactive map has been updated. It visualizes institutional nodes and recurrent spatial trajectories identified through fieldwork. [The map can be accessed here.](#)

5.2 Resources utilized by homeless migrants and their effectiveness

This section documents the support networks migrants rely on, including formal government assistance, non-governmental organizations, and informal community-based supports.

“C’est triste que notre pays accueille des gens et que le système contribue à les pousser dans la rue. On ne va pas faire partie de ça, ni l’encourager”. (Director of a community organization)

Migrants experiencing homelessness rely on a combination of governmental, community-based, and informal resources to meet their basic needs. However, these supports function largely as a temporary system that sustains a form of permanent precarity rather than enabling durable housing stability. While multiple forms of assistance exist, none provide comprehensive or long-term solutions on their own.

Moreover, services are not only insufficient but also by fragmented. Access to appropriate assistance depends heavily on migrants’ ability to understand complex systems and connect quickly with the right intermediaries. Informational inequality therefore plays a significant role: for some migrants, especially those who have family, friends, or connections, early contact with effective organizations can facilitate stabilization, while others may cycle indeterminately through emergency responses.

Government services

At the governmental level, **PRAIDA** constitutes the primary formal response. Mandated by the Ministry of Health, it provides temporary accommodation, health care, psychosocial support, legal orientation, and referrals for asylum seekers who apply within prescribed timeframes. Orientation trainings are offered, aiming at familiarizing migrants with the housing systems, the job market, and services offered by the state. Lengths of stay range from fourteen days for single men to up to one hundred days for families. Although PRAIDA offers relatively stable and dignified short-term support, its effectiveness is limited by strict eligibility criteria, time limits, and the inability to readmit individuals who leave. Those who do not meet eligibility requirements—including many migrants with precarious or irregular status, or migrants who apply for asylum more than two weeks after their entry—are excluded entirely. Participants also emphasized that PRAIDA's hosting policy has remained largely unchanged for more than twenty years, making it poorly adapted to current migration patterns, housing conditions, and economic realities. Other governmental resources, such as Immigrants Québec, were described as insufficiently adapted to vulnerable migrants and largely inaccessible to those in situations of residential instability. In addition, most migrants do not have access to the shelters and services designed for the domestic homeless population, further limiting their formal support options.

The government offers French language classes, which are widely recognized as essential for accessing and integrating into the job market. However, according to most participants, availability is limited, and waiting periods can last several months before enrollment. In addition, courses are often scheduled throughout the day, making attendance difficult to sustain—particularly for those with caregiving responsibilities, such as mothers who must look after their children.

Community-based organizations

Community-based organizations play a particularly critical—though insufficient—role in helping migrants navigate institutions by providing documentation assistance, institutional translation, and formal letters required for accessing services or housing. In many accounts, these organizations are described as the most reliable sources of support, especially when personal networks are absent or fail.

Among them, the **Welcome Collective** (Collectif Bienvenue) occupies a central position, particularly for migrants who are not (or no longer) eligible for PRAIDA. The organization provides legal advice and support regardless of migration status, assists with asylum applications, distributes essential goods, and offers limited transportation assistance. Most importantly, it offers moral support, create a sense of community by connecting migrants to one another, and help restore the feeling of dignity. Its headquarters include a large warehouse of second-hand furniture and clothing, which migrants can access through participation in the organization's activities. Volunteering functions as a key mechanism of support: migrants contribute labour in exchange for donations, occasional small stipends, and, most importantly, opportunities to build social networks that they otherwise lack. Through this process, migrants create mutual support systems, find emotional reassurance, and regain a sense of dignity through listening, helping, hosting, and being hosted. The organization also coordinates emergency housing through a network of volunteers who temporarily host migrants in their homes. Despite its central role, support remains temporary, and staff report very limited capacity to respond to the scale and complexity of migrant homelessness.

The Refugee Centre, also a central resource, represents a distinct and comparatively effective community-based model. It provides legal, administrative, housing, and employment support to migrants regardless of status and has developed **an innovative housing approach**. Since 2021, the organization has acted as an apartment manager by renting units directly, prepaying rent, serving as guarantor, and signing leases on behalf of migrants. This arrangement enables access to renewable six-month housing placements and allows migrants to build rental and credit histories that can support future housing access. Participants consistently described this model as successful in stabilizing housing trajectories, although its scale remains limited relatively to overall need.

Homeless support organizations and community shelters offer temporary accommodation to migrants with legal status. Individuals without regular status are generally provided short-term shelter—typically up to three days—after which they are required to exit the system due to institutional eligibility constraints. Homeless shelters are seldom convenient solutions for migrants, especially families and women. In some of them, participants reported a racist attitude from domestic homeless people who saw in the migrants homeless an unmeriting competition over already limited resources.

In sum, **formal resources appear most effective when they include active accompaniment in several areas at once**—such as help with documentation, landlord negotiation, inclusion in the job market, and institutional mediation. These networks are increasingly saturated, with overcrowding, limited space, and volunteer fatigue reducing their sustainability and transforming them into temporary buffers rather than durable solutions.

Informal support

Informal and peer-based support also play an important role. Migrants frequently rely on other migrants through personal networks and relationships, often formed in settings such as community organizations, volunteer networks, or places of worship. Volunteering within organizations can provide access to food banks, clothing, and socialization, partially compensating for the lack of formal assistance. These networks provide emotional support, occasional temporary housing, and information about employment or services, but they are fragile and uneven.

These forms of support are closely aligned with what is commonly described as “hidden homelessness,” where individuals rely on temporary and informal living arrangements, such as staying with friends, relatives, or acquaintances, without secure tenure or long-term stability (Oudshoorn, 2019). While these arrangements can provide immediate relief, they often remain invisible in official statistics and may mask the extent and persistence of housing precarity.

Yet, at times, informal resources, while often the fastest means of securing immediate shelter or income, are sometimes described as unstable and potentially harmful. Family, acquaintances, and religious networks may provide temporary protection, but can also become sites of control or abuse, particularly when migrants lack language skills or legal knowledge. This limited reliance on formal services must also be understood in relation to the cultural and institutional unfitness of existing service systems (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 2021). Research has shown that homelessness services are often not designed to accommodate the specific needs of racialized and newcomer populations, which can lead to mistrust, miscommunication, and reduced use, even in situations of acute need.

For some migrants, particularly women, housing arrangements within informal networks may involve coercive or exploitative conditions, including situations where continued access to shelter is made contingent on unpaid labour, disproportionate financial contributions, or other forms of pressured or unequal exchanges tied to housing security. Fear of institutional consequences, stigma, or immigration repercussions may discourage recourse to formal services, reinforcing invisibility and heightening exposure to risk.

As for informal or semi-clandestine employment, though it may ensure short-term survival, it frequently exposes migrants to exploitative labour arrangements, increasing the risk of renewed displacement.

Informal support networks also operate as ambivalent forms of protection. While they may prevent immediate street homelessness, they can **reproduce dependency and instability**.

Overall, migrants depend on an interlocking system of short-term governmental assistance, overstretched community organizations, and fragile informal networks. While these resources help meet immediate survival needs and provide moments of stability, they rarely produce lasting housing security. Instead, they

collectively sustain a condition of prolonged precarity in which migrants remain continuously supported yet insufficiently stabilized.

5.3 Systems that help or constrain homeless migrants

This section explores governmental, community-based, and informal network's support to vulnerable migrants.

Existing housing support systems play an ambivalent role in migrants' housing trajectories. They provide essential short-term protection and prevent immediate street homelessness, yet they also reproduce and institutionalize long-term residential instability. **The effectiveness of available resources depends not only on their existence, but on timing, mediation, and migrants' capacity to access and activate them within restrictive institutional contexts.** Across governmental, community-based, and informal supports, assistance is largely not well communicated, temporary, fragmented, and unevenly accessible, resulting in a system that manages precarity rather than resolving it.

The Legal System

Administrative precarity and unresolved immigration status operate not only as contextual factors but as direct mechanisms producing housing instability, as prolonged waiting periods, temporary permits, and restricted eligibility for support suspend migrants in extended material uncertainty. Institutional eligibility thresholds, jurisdictional boundaries, and long processing delays can systematically exclude migrants from preventive support, creating prolonged periods of waiting and uncertainty during which individuals "fall between systems." This exposure is intensified by a structural mismatch between immigration timelines and housing market conditions, even for migrants with a legal status: reception programs and temporary accommodations presume rapid transition into private housing, yet migrants are frequently required to leave these arrangements before any viable housing options become available. In this context, **homelessness is often sustained not by individual factors but by institutional gaps that limits access to stabilization tools and harmonization between legal systems and housing solutions.**

The City of Montreal

The city, though it's conscious of the growing problem of homeless migrants, seems unable to address this specific problem. Following the election of the new Mayor whose priority is to address homelessness, several key strategies were put in place. Resources and funds have been allocated to organizations specialized in the reduction and prevention of homelessness. The city launched several campaigns based on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to raise awareness in neighborhoods with encampments, to solicit the empathy of citizens and to encourage their acceptance of the presence of people experiencing homelessness in their neighborhood. Several psychological workers were in the streets trying to support the homeless based on a personalized case by case approach. The number of heat shelters is being increased, as well as the number of housing units, 2,000 new transitory housing units will be added. From a governance perspective, the management of the city of Montreal acknowledges the administrative heaviness in the funding allocated for the prevention and reduction of homelessness. To address this issue, a tactical intervention team composed of municipal, provincial, and federal stakeholders has been put in place to work on policies and actions on the issue of homelessness. Yet, and even though all these strategies seem to be very promising, none of them address directly the problem of homeless migrants. With the municipal authorities, homeless migrants seem to also fall in a gap regarding policies, support, and interventions. Even the count of homeless migrants is not accurate, which make the problem difficult to evaluate and new adapted policies difficult to create.

PRAIDA

Governmental housing support, particularly through PRAIDA, constitutes the main formal response. It offers temporary accommodation and related services that can provide an initial period of stability and safety. However, strict eligibility criteria, limited lengths of stay, and barriers to re-entry significantly constrain its capacity to support long-term housing outcomes. Many migrants—especially those with precarious or irregular status—are excluded entirely. Moreover, participants emphasized that hosting policies have remained largely unchanged for decades, despite major shifts in migration patterns and housing markets. As a result, governmental support often functions as a short transitional stage rather than a pathway to stable housing. Once time limits expire, migrants must re-enter an uncertain housing market marked by discrimination, unaffordable rents, and exclusion, which frequently returns them to instability and homelessness.

Non-governmental organizations

Community-based organizations play a crucial role in filling these structural gaps. Organizations such as the Welcome Collective provide legal information, material assistance, moral support, and emergency housing through volunteer hosting networks. These supports help migrants meet immediate needs, rebuild social ties, and regain a sense of dignity and belonging. In some cases, innovative models—such as the Refugee Centre’s housing management approach, which involves acting as guarantor, prepaying rent, and helping migrants build rental histories—demonstrate the potential for more stabilizing interventions. However, these initiatives remain limited in scale. Most community support is temporary and resource-constrained, and organizations themselves report being overburdened by the complexity and volume of need. In this context, community assistance, though essential, often prolongs survival within precarious conditions rather than enabling durable exits from homelessness. Some organizations even perceive their role as compensating for state withdrawal, highlighting the structural limits of their interventions.

The Refugee Centre: renting as stabilization (Montreal)

A housing program at a Montreal-based refugee-serving organization frames its intervention not as emergency shelter, but as a way to rebuild housing credibility for people who arrive with no rental history, no guarantor, and limited access to the private market. The model starts inside the rental market. The organization secures apartments across several boroughs and pays the full year of rent upfront, often at a negotiated rate. This reduces perceived risk for landlords and, in practice, creates access to units that would otherwise remain out of reach for recently arrived asylum seekers. It also reduces the risk of migrants being exploited by tenants renting them precarious accommodations at high prices.

The organization acts as an intermediary: it manages the relationship with landlords, sets basic house rules, and provides a point of contact when issues arise. The program operates at a modest but concrete scale: 14 apartments, 27 rooms, hosting approximately 43–47 people at a time. Stays are structured as transitional. Residents typically enter on six-month agreements, sometimes extended to nine months when exit to the regular market is not yet feasible. Placement and cohabitation, actively managed—matches, are organized to reduce conflict, and includes considerations such as language and gender. Residents are oriented to expectations in shared living environments. Support is present but not 24/7; the organization assumes a minimum level of autonomy and intervenes primarily to mediate conflicts, clarify rules, and maintain stability. Housing is not treated as a standalone service. Residents are connected to a broader support package (information sessions and workshops, administrative guidance, referrals, French courses that are more flexible than classes offered by the government, and practical orientation). Yet the program’s operational logic is consistent: housing comes first as an anchoring step, and the transitional period is used to create conditions for a more durable exit—through stability, documentation, and a first experience of maintaining a lease in Montreal.

Informal networks

As discussed in Section 5.2, informal networks play a critical but fragile role in migrants' housing trajectories. At the system level, their growing importance reflects gaps in formal provision, effectively shifting responsibility for immediate housing solutions toward peer-based and community-mediated arrangements (Djogbenou *et al.*, 2025). Migrants often navigate the same constrained housing and support systems as other vulnerable populations, revealing broader systemic limitations in resource availability rather than direct competition between groups. Findings show that they tend to be closed off to sharing services with them, feeling a strong sense of entitlement to the support systems they believe are theirs by right. Moreover, in many cases, domestic homeless individuals express racial biases, judging migrants based on their language, their clothing, and other cultural differences, and consequently reject or exclude them.

Housing support systems

Taken together, housing support systems operate within a fragmented institutional landscape in which immigration, housing, employment, and social services function with limited coordination. Administrative barriers, legal precarity, and exclusion from the formal rental market intersect to create circular obstacles that prevent migrants from achieving stability. Rather than forming a coherent pathway out of homelessness, existing supports create successive temporary solutions that sustain prolonged uncertainty. The overall effect is a system that both alleviates immediate risk and simultaneously reproduces the structural conditions that keep migrants in precarious housing situations.

Institutional mediation emerges as a central enabling mechanism within housing support systems. Beyond providing services, community organizations often function as guarantors, translators, and trust brokers between migrants and landlords, compensating for missing credentials such as credit history, references, or stable employment. At the same time, housing pathways are shaped by multiple filtering and exit points—eligibility restrictions, language barriers, limited transitional capacity, and timeframes misaligned with housing market realities—which disrupt continuity and prolong instability. The interviews also point to a broader pattern of delegated governance, whereby responsibility for migrant housing is increasingly shifted to the community sector or informal networks, even as resource constraints and system overload limit its capacity to produce durable solutions.

Additional findings highlight specific enabling conditions and structural barriers shaping migrants' access to housing. Stabilization is facilitated by clear institutional guidance, accompaniment, and access to complementary supports such as health care, childcare, and food assistance, as well as non-stigmatizing spaces that reinforce agency. At the same time, misaligned institutional timelines, documentation requirements that create circular dependency, exclusionary rental practices, language barriers, and safety risks within shared housing environments further constrain migrants' capacity to secure and sustain stable accommodation.

5.4 Difference between migrant homelessness and local/domestic homelessness

Transnational trajectories and cumulative trauma

The most obvious difference between migrant and domestic homelessness are the transnational trajectories and cumulative trauma. The housing instability that migrants face in Montreal is an extension of displacement, border crossings, family separation, and violence experienced before arrival.

Single moment of rupture and disaffiliation vs. a systemic layering of vulnerability

Migrant homelessness differs from local or domestic homelessness in its underlying dynamics, social composition, and structural conditions. Domestic homelessness is more frequently associated with

identifiable biographical ruptures—family breakdown, institutional discharge, mental health crises, addiction, or long-term socioeconomic marginalization.

Most fundamentally, vulnerability among migrants is not typically triggered by a single moment of rupture—such as a personal crisis, family breakdown, or loss of housing—but is instead gradually constructed and layered over time. **Their pathways into homelessness are shaped by administrative barriers, legal precarity, and institutional constraints that progressively accumulate and reinforce one another.** In this sense, migrant homelessness is produced through legally mediated, institutionally reinforced, and racially differentiated processes rather than through sudden disaffiliation alone.

Visibility and temporality

Visibility constitutes another major difference. Domestic homelessness is more readily captured through shelters, street presence, and institutional cycling. Migrant homelessness, in contrast, is predominantly hidden, unfolding within private or semi-private spaces such as overcrowded apartments, temporary hosting arrangements, or informal sublets. This invisibility contributes to systematic undercounting and misevaluation of the problem in policy responses.

Temporal patterns also differ. Domestic homelessness often involves cyclical/chronic movement through institutions, whereas migrant homelessness tends toward a more linear path marked by gradually increased vulnerability but that, after a long and traumatizing struggle, often ends with a story of resilience and residential stability. The precarity of homeless migrants is less, with delayed entry into formal homelessness systems. When migrants do appear in shelters, it is often after extended periods of hidden homelessness.

Institutional, social, and cultural barriers and layers of Otherness

Social isolation is a defining feature of migrant homelessness. Language barriers, limited or nonexistent social networks, and the absence of an established community significantly restrict access to support. Many migrants experience **racial profiling and discrimination in both employment and housing**, further narrowing their opportunities. At the same time, their precarious or uncertain legal status complicates access to services and benefits, leaving them with **fewer protections and fewer points of entry into formal support systems. In contrast to local homeless populations, migrants often encounter a near absence of accessible support organizations, intensifying their isolation.**

The demographic profile of migrant homelessness also differs. It more frequently involves families and women with children rather than predominantly single individuals. Moreover, the causes of homelessness among migrants are often unrelated to substance use or mental health conditions. While depression or substance use may occur, they are generally described as consequences of prolonged instability rather than primary drivers to homelessness.

“Le plan de vie”

Another key distinction lies in migrants’ orientation toward the future. Many retain clear life plans and actively mobilize all available resources to stabilize their situation. In general, their homelessness unfolds alongside ongoing efforts to integrate, secure employment, and rebuild their lives. This contrasts with common conceptualizations of domestic homelessness often centered on rupture and disaffiliation.

Future-oriented projects shape migrants’ trajectories before arrival, as many envision long-term integration and opportunity based on **Canada’s image as a welcoming country**—an idealized perception often formed in countries of origin. Migrant homelessness reveals a significant gap between these expectations and the lived realities of those who encounter rigid systems, limited support, and prolonged precarity. When aspirations for stability and inclusion collide with structural barriers, the result is often disillusionment, stalled life trajectories, and, in some cases, the abandonment of migration projects altogether.

5.5 Synthesis of Findings

This research highlights the structural and systemic nature of migrant homelessness in Montreal, revealing a phenomenon that is both widespread and largely invisible. Migrant homelessness frequently unfolds in dispersed and largely invisible forms across private and semi-private spaces. Many migrants move through institutional entry points before transitioning into overcrowded and substandard housing, short-term hosting arrangements, couch surfing, or dependency-based living situations, and undergo repetitive evictions. Because migrant homelessness often takes such form, it is difficult to measure and frequently remains outside conventional definitions of homelessness. As a result, the scale of the issue is underestimated, and policy responses remain insufficiently adapted to migrants' lived realities.

A central finding of this study is the persistent gap between the image of Canada as a welcoming country and the realities migrants encounter upon arrival. Vulnerable migrants come from diverse countries of origin and enter through multiple pathways, with dreams, aspirations, and life-plans. Yet disillusion quickly sets in, as many encounter a system structured around temporary and limited forms of support that sustain long-term precarity rather than stability. Administrative delays, rigid eligibility criteria, and insufficient services collectively create barriers to housing and employment, which in turn increase vulnerability.

For many migrants, exclusion from both the rental and labor markets exposes them to exploitation and abuse, making housing and employment key sites for structuring vulnerability. As for housing formal support systems, they hinder migrant stabilization not primarily through absence, but through procedural rigidity, outdated policy models, and reliance on organizations.

The research also underscores how migrant homelessness differs significantly from domestic homelessness in its causes, trajectories, and lived experiences, including gendered dimensions that shape how men and women navigate risk, safety, and access to support. At the same time, tensions may emerge between migrant and domestic populations competing for limited resources, further complicating service provision. Some community organizations perceive providing support to migrants as a form of complicity.

Despite these challenges, promising practices do exist. Programs such as the Refugee Centre's housing model demonstrate that more stable and structured approaches—such as organizational lease agreements, guaranteed rent payments, and the creation of rental histories—can improve migrants' access to housing and support longer-term integration. Such programs that act as formal intermediaries with landlords are particularly effective in establishing initial residential stability. However, these initiatives remain limited in scale, and many migrants struggle to transition from transitional or mediated housing into independent temporary and instable arrangements.

Overall, migrant homelessness is not simply the result of individual vulnerability but is shaped by institutional arrangements that produce and sustain precarious living conditions. Addressing this issue requires moving beyond short-term accommodation toward structural responses that expand access to housing, employment, and services, reduce administrative barriers, and recognize the specific realities of migrant populations. Without such changes, temporary support systems will continue to reproduce instability rather than resolve it, leaving many migrants trapped in cycles of hidden and persistent homelessness.

6. DISCUSSION AND IMPACT

Section 6 interprets the findings presented in Section 5 and examines what they reveal about how migrant homelessness in Montreal unfolds as a process shaped by institutional rules, housing-market constraints, and patterns of service organization. Rather than revisiting individual cases, this section identifies the recurring mechanisms observed across interviews and mapping exercises. The analysis shifts from description to interpretation, clarifying how these dynamics interact and shape migrants' housing trajectories over time. By highlighting the structural conditions that sustain housing instability, this section also outlines the broader implications of the research for policy, service coordination, and urban planning. These insights inform the recommendations presented in Section 7.

Reframing Migrant Homelessness: From Rupture to Systemic Misalignment

The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research suggesting that migrant homelessness cannot be adequately understood through conceptual frameworks traditionally developed to interpret domestic homelessness. While dominant paradigms have emphasized rupture, social disaffiliation, and visible deprivation as primary explanatory lenses, the empirical evidence gathered in Montreal points toward a different set of mechanisms shaping housing instability among migrants. These mechanisms are not centered on individual crises or the erosion of social ties, but rather on systemic misalignments across institutional timelines, housing markets, and governance structures.

This interpretation is consistent with policy research showing that homelessness responses are shaped by fragmented governance structures, competing institutional mandates, and the absence of coordinated action across sectors (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2021). As a consequence, policy change in this domain has proven to be rarely linear, as it depends not only on evidence but also on political dynamics, timing, and the alignment of multiple actors and systems.

Recent sociodemographic analyses of homelessness in Montreal indicate that racialized groups, particularly Black individuals, many of whom are recent immigrants or asylum seekers, present distinct profiles characterized by more recent episodes of homelessness, higher levels of education and employment, and different patterns of service use (Ouedraogo *et al.*, 2026). These findings reinforce the need to understand migrant homelessness as a specific and differentiated phenomenon, rather than as an extension of existing homelessness dynamics (Taylor, 2018).

This interpretation is further supported by recent policy-oriented analyses, which show that migrant homelessness is closely linked to structural gaps across immigration, housing, and social service systems (ÉRIQA, 2024). In particular, fragmented governance, restrictive eligibility criteria, and mismatches between institutional timelines and migrants' administrative realities contribute directly to housing instability. Rather than reflecting individual vulnerability alone, these dynamics point to the ways in which policy frameworks can actively produce and reproduce conditions of precarity.

This shift in analytical perspective is not merely theoretical. Conceptual frameworks shape how homelessness is measured, how resources are allocated, and how policies are designed. The persistence of migrant homelessness despite extensive policy attention to homelessness more broadly suggests that dominant interpretive models may be insufficient for capturing the specific dynamics affecting migrant populations. Revisiting these models in light of empirical evidence is therefore essential for informing more effective policy and programmatic responses.

Limits of rupture-based and disaffiliation frameworks

Much of the Canadian homelessness literature has conceptualized pathways into homelessness through the notion of rupture—critical life events such as eviction, institutional discharge, or family breakdown that precipitate a sudden loss of housing. Complementing this perspective, sociological frameworks of social disaffiliation have emphasized the gradual weakening of employment and relational supports as individuals move toward social exclusion. These lenses have proven analytically powerful for understanding many trajectories among Canadian-born populations, particularly those characterized by cyclical shelter use and visible street presence.

However, the empirical findings of this study suggest that migrant homelessness often unfolds differently. Many migrants do not experience a discrete moment of rupture within the host-city context. Instead, housing instability frequently begins upon arrival, before any meaningful residential anchoring has occurred. The absence of a clear “before” complicates the explanatory power of rupture-based narratives, which implicitly assume prior stability within the local housing system.

Similarly, disaffiliation frameworks may only partially capture migrant trajectories. While these frameworks highlight the erosion of employment and social networks, many migrants maintain strong relational ties and community connections even as they face persistent housing insecurity. In such cases, vulnerability stems less from social isolation than from institutional exclusion or delayed access to stabilizing supports. These findings align with emerging research indicating that migrant homelessness is often structured by administrative barriers, eligibility constraints, and housing market discrimination rather than by the progressive weakening of social integration.

Taken together, the results suggest that migrant homelessness exposes the limits of conceptual models calibrated primarily to domestic experiences of housing loss. Rather than discarding rupture and disaffiliation, this study builds on them as reference points through which alternative explanatory mechanisms become visible.

A systemic and multiscale understanding of migrant homelessness

The empirical evidence gathered through interviews and institutional analysis points toward a systemic and multiscale production of housing precarity. Migrant trajectories are shaped by interactions across multiple levels of governance and policy domains, including federal immigration processes, provincial reception infrastructures, municipal homelessness services, and the private housing market. These domains operate according to distinct temporalities and policy logics, creating cumulative exposure to housing risk.

This study conceptualizes these dynamics through three interrelated mechanisms: institutional desynchronization, erosion, and institutional non-anchoring. Institutional desynchronization refers to the temporal mismatch between immigration timelines and housing market realities. Migrants may be required to secure stable housing before obtaining work authorization, rental history, or sufficient income, resulting in prolonged reliance on temporary accommodations.

Erosion describes the gradual weakening of housing stability through successive short-term arrangements. Rather than experiencing a sudden fall into homelessness, migrants often navigate a sequence of temporary placements, overcrowded rentals, informal sublets, and shelter stays. Each transition may appear manageable in isolation, yet collectively these movements generate cumulative precarity.

Institutional non-anchoring captures the broader condition in which migrants are present in the city but insufficiently stabilized by its institutional infrastructures. Legal recognition, community ties, and economic motivation may coexist with persistent exclusion from housing pathways due to fragmented governance and restrictive eligibility regimes. This framework emphasizes that migrant homelessness is not primarily a failure of integration, but an outcome of systemic misalignment between protection regimes and housing systems.

Implications of framing for policy and practice

How homelessness is framed has direct consequences for policy responses. When homelessness is interpreted primarily as a visible and individualized problem, interventions tend to prioritize emergency shelters, crisis management, and behavioral supports. Such approaches have been effective in addressing certain forms of domestic homelessness, particularly those involving acute crises or recurrent shelter use.

However, our findings of this study suggest that these responses may be less effective for migrant populations whose trajectories are shaped by hidden precarity and institutional fragmentation. For example, time-limited reception programs that assume rapid transitions into private housing may inadvertently reproduce instability when migrants lack the resources required to secure housing within constrained rental markets. Similarly, prevention strategies focused on moments of rupture may fail to detect housing risk that emerges gradually through administrative delays or informal living arrangements.

A systemic framing of migrant homelessness implies different policy priorities. Early stabilization measures—such as coordinated case management, rental mediation programs, and bridging supports aligned with immigration timelines—become central tools for prevention. Rather than focusing solely on emergency accommodation, policy interventions must address structural barriers within housing markets and service systems.

Spatial considerations are equally important. The distribution of services across urban territories influences migrants' ability to maintain housing stability. Fragmented service geographies can increase mobility burdens and reduce continuity of care, particularly for families navigating complex institutional landscapes. A multiscale approach therefore requires integrating spatial planning considerations into homelessness and settlement policies.

Toward a paradigm shift in the understanding of homelessness

The results of this study support calls for a differentiated epistemology of homelessness—one that recognizes the heterogeneity of pathways and the structural conditions shaping them. Migrant homelessness should not be viewed as a marginal variation of domestic homelessness, but as a phenomenon that reveals broader systemic dynamics within contemporary housing systems.

By highlighting institutional desynchronization and non-anchoring, migrant trajectories illuminate how homelessness can be produced even in the absence of visible crises or social disaffiliation. This perspective challenges the dominance of snapshot-based measurement tools and underscores the importance of longitudinal and process-oriented analyses.

Importantly, reframing migrant homelessness has practical implications. Policy instruments designed around visible homelessness may overlook the majority of migrants experiencing housing precarity, particularly women and families relying on informal arrangements. Recognizing hidden homelessness as a central component of migrant trajectories is therefore essential for designing effective prevention strategies and improving data collection practices.

Ultimately, adopting a systemic and multiscale lens does not negate the relevance of existing conceptual traditions. Rather, it extends them by situating individual experiences within broader institutional and spatial dynamics. This reframing enables policymakers to move beyond crisis-oriented responses toward structural interventions that address the root causes of housing instability.

Key Analytical Insight

The empirical findings presented in this report demonstrate that migrant homelessness is best understood as the outcome of cumulative systemic processes rather than isolated life events. By revisiting dominant conceptual frameworks through the lens of migration, this study contributes to a broader rethinking of homelessness as a multidimensional and institutionally mediated phenomenon.

Such a shift is necessary not only for theoretical clarity but for practical effectiveness. Policies informed by an incomplete understanding of homelessness risk perpetuating instability rather than resolving it. A systemic and multiscale approach offers a more accurate basis for intervention, enabling earlier detection of housing risk, improved coordination across governance levels, and the development of pathways toward durable housing stability.

6.1. From individual crises to a system-produced phenomenon

The results indicate that migrant homelessness in Montreal is shaped less by isolated personal crises and more by how institutions and markets interact. Across interviews, the main drivers consistently pointed to structural constraints—migration status, eligibility rules, administrative timelines, language barriers, discrimination, and rental-market filters—that prolong housing instability even among individuals who are actively seeking work and stability (see Section 5: “Structural Drivers of Migrant Homelessness”). This distinction matters. Expanding emergency shelter capacity addresses immediate need but does not prevent the system from repeatedly placing people back into precarious situations.

These findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that migrant populations generate additional pressure on housing systems. Rather, they reveal how existing institutional arrangements and market conditions produce and prolong housing instability for specific groups.

Implication for policy and system design: migrant homelessness reflects how rules, timelines, entry points, and housing markets interact to produce vulnerability. It is not a function of demographic pressure alone, but of systemic organization.

6.2. From a “rupture model” to a “non-anchoring” and cumulative exposure model

Many trajectories described in the interviews did not begin with a single break or crisis. Instead, instability accumulated over time. Participants spoke of repeated waiting periods, unstable addresses, documentation gaps, precarious employment, and cycles through temporary housing (see Section 5: “Difference between migrant homelessness and local/domestic homelessness”). Housing instability therefore builds gradually rather than appearing suddenly. While these patterns are observed among migrants, they are rooted in broader systemic conditions that affect multiple vulnerable populations, though migrants often experience them more intensely due to administrative and structural barriers.

Implication for policy and system design: prevention must begin before visible homelessness occurs. The critical moment is early stabilization and maintaining continuity afterward.

6.3. Entry points and routing failures

The interviews show that early contact with institutions strongly influences later outcomes. Individuals who received clear information, timely documentation, and coordinated referrals were better positioned to stabilize. Those who entered late, relied on informal advice, or navigated fragmented pathways encountered gaps and delays. The vignette in Section 5 (“Habiba’s story”) illustrates how misinformation and rigid procedures can prolong instability before stable support is secured.

Implication for policy and system design: trajectories are shaped not only by “need” but by routing, information, and cross-service coordination. Strengthening the “front door” and improving handoffs reduces systemic risk.

6.4. Institutional Clustering and Mobility Constraints

The mapping of trajectories shows that movements are concentrated around a limited number of institutional nodes. Most participants described a similar sequence: arrival at the airport, referral to PRAIDA, temporary accommodation, and repeated visits to support organizations in central Montréal. These movements reflect how services are organized. Reception centres, shelters, and community organizations are geographically

clustered, while temporary housing is often located elsewhere. Participants described the consequences of this dispersion: travel time, transportation costs, missed appointments, and delays in documentation or employment search. When housing and services are physically disconnected, stabilization becomes more difficult.

Implication for policy and system design: Territorial coordination should be treated as part of housing policy design, not as a secondary logistical concern.

6.5. Temporal mismatch: administrative timelines and the rental market

Interviewees repeatedly described delays between administrative processes (permits, appointments, assistance approvals) and the pace of the rental market. Temporary government hosting arrangements were also described as strictly time-limited—for example, reported stays ranging from 14 days for single men to approximately 100 days for families (see Section 5: “Resources utilized...”). When these limits expire, individuals must compete in a rental market that requires credit history, guarantors, or documentation they may not yet have.

Implication for policy and system design: when administrative timelines do not align with housing realities, instability becomes predictable. Time coordination is as important as bed capacity.

6.6. Institutional fragmentation

Different systems—immigration, employment, health, shelters, housing—operate under separate mandates and rules. Participants described having to repeat paperwork, retell their stories, and navigate inconsistent requirements (see Section 5: synthesis “Housing support systems”). Over time, this repetition generates fatigue and service discontinuity. Some individuals described moving back and forth between organizations without clear resolution.

Implication for policy and system design: improving outcomes requires strengthening coordination and continuity across services, not only adding resources within each sector.

6.7. The rental market as an exclusion system

The results make visible that a substantial share of housing precarity is produced “inside” the rental market through de facto barriers: guarantors, credit histories, documentation and status constraints, and overt or covert discrimination. These filters push people into high-risk arrangements—overcrowding, informal sublets, problematic deposits, and inadequate units (see Section 5: “Structural Drivers...” and the passages on discrimination and housing exploitation). This is not only a question of supply; it is also a question of missing mechanisms that can substitute for trust/guarantees in a market that penalizes newcomers without local histories.

Implication for policy and system design: increasing housing supply is necessary but insufficient. Mechanisms that help newcomers meet rental requirements—such as institutional guarantees or mediated lease agreements—can reduce barriers to entry.

6.8. The job market as an exclusion system

The results show that the job market is another exclusion system for homeless migrants. The conditional recognition of diplomas and the non-recognition of previous work experience, language and cultural barriers, and sometimes discrimination represents challenges for finding a consistent job.

Implication for policy and system design: Mechanisms that help newcomers meet job requirements—such as free trainings or connections with employers where the work force is scarce—can reduce barriers to entry.

6.9. Invisibility and undercounting

A significant portion of migrant homelessness appears as hidden homelessness: couch surfing, rotating through informal networks, and avoiding services due to fear, stigma, or perceived risks linked to status (see Section 5: passages on “invisible homelessness” and legal precarity). This reduces statistical visibility and shifts public responses toward what is most visible (street homelessness and shelters), leaving forms of precarious housing largely unaddressed.

Implication for policy and system design: measurement and planning instruments anchored in visible homelessness tend to arrive late. Policy needs metrics and methods capable of capturing hidden trajectories and early risk.

6.10. Informal networks as parallel infrastructure

Informal networks (extended family, community ties, WhatsApp-based information sharing, hosting arrangements, places of worship) appear as a parallel survival infrastructure that temporarily sustains shelter and access to information (see Section 5: “Informal support” and the description of hosting under “Community-based organizations”). However, this infrastructure is fragile: it saturates, erodes, and can expose people to coercion or abuse. In Section 5: “Spatial Trajectories and Urban Navigation,” this pattern is described as “forced urban nomadism,” associated with repeated moves (including multiple housing changes in a month) and with lack of storage as a material dimension of instability.

Implication for policy and system design: when the formal system does not convert temporary supports into stabilization pathways, informal networks function as a buffer that can end up sustaining prolonged precarity.

6.11. Gender and safety: housing precarity as exposure to violence and control

Women’s trajectories—particularly for women without status or in dependency relationships—are marked by specific risks: domestic violence, coercion, threats, sexual harassment, and “private” housing arrangements where power is highly asymmetric (see Section 5: “A Trajectory Marked by Power Imbalance, Shame, and Uncertainty”). This dimension often remains invisible because the street is not always the central setting; precarity frequently unfolds indoors, under control or fear.

Implication for policy and system design: responses cannot be gender-neutral. “Housing solutions” must explicitly incorporate safety, privacy, and continuity, not only short-term shelter.

6.12. Integrated implications for system and city design

Taken together, the results point to a consistent pattern: Montreal has multiple supports that can prevent immediate street homelessness, but these often operate as a temporary system that sustains a form of prolonged precarity rather than enabling stable exits (see Section 5: “Resources utilized...”, including the statement about a “temporary system that sustains a form of permanent precarity,” and the synthesis “Housing support systems”). This yields a set of design principles that should guide the next section (Recommendations), without restating findings:

- **Continuity and routing** as a central function (reducing bounce and eligibility losses).
- **Temporal alignment** across administrative processes, supports, and housing access.
- **Reducing informational friction** (reliable, multilingual, spatially grounded information).
- **Mediating the rental market** to substitute credit/guarantees and address discrimination.
- From emergency stays to **lasting housing solutions**.
- **Safety and gender** as explicit criteria in policy and service design.
- **Capturing the invisible** (measures that detect precarity before street homelessness).
- **A spatial lens (LSL):** nodes, corridors, and the geography of resources as part of the solution.
- **Reform phasing** to move from emergency responses to **long-term stability**.

Taken together, the mechanisms discussed across Sections 6.1–6.11 reveal that migrant homelessness emerges from the interaction of institutional timelines, market filters, and fragmented governance structures rather than from isolated crises. The table below synthesizes how key actors intervene within this process-based framework, indicating where erosion is mitigated, where non-anchoring persists, and where institutional desynchronization is reproduced.

Table 1. Institutional mechanisms shaping migrant homelessness trajectories in Montreal

Institutional Actor	Structural Position in the System	Mechanism Activated in Migrant Trajectories	Structural Limits	Effect on Housing Trajectory (Process-Based)
Immigration / Legal System	Status-regulating governance structure	Temporal regulation of eligibility, work permits, and protection	Long processing delays; eligibility gaps; administrative burden	Produces institutional desynchronization; prolongs exposure to housing risk; initiates cumulative erosion
PRAIDA (Reception Infrastructure)	Provincial reception and triage node at arrival	Temporary institutional anchoring at entry; short-term containment	Time-limited stays; strict eligibility; weak alignment with rental market	Reduces immediate exposure but does not resolve non-anchoring; exit deadlines may accelerate erosion
Emergency Shelters (e.g., Old Brewery Mission, Maison du Père)	Crisis-containment infrastructure	Short-term institutional stabilization; mediation in limited cases	Embedded in fragmented governance; dependent on rental market access	Delays visible homelessness; may normalize prolonged precarity if stabilization pathways fail
Community-Based Navigation Organizations (e.g., Collectif Bienvenu)	Relational and informational infrastructure	Routing correction; rebuilding social anchoring; institutional translation	Limited housing leverage; resource saturation	Reduces routing failures; slows erosion; does not structurally alter market exclusion
Rental-Market Intermediaries (e.g., Refugee Centre model)	Market-mediating civil-society actors	Institutional substitution for missing rental credibility (guarantor, lease management)	Limited scale; resource intensive; reliant on landlord cooperation	Converts non-anchoring into temporary anchoring; directly mitigates exclusionary filters; reduces erosion
Private Rental Market	Primary housing allocation mechanism	Structural filtering (credit history, guarantors, documentation, discrimination)	Scarcity, affordability crisis, racialized exclusion	Core producer of institutional non-anchoring; accelerates cumulative erosion
Informal Networks (family, peers, religious communities)	Parallel survival infrastructure	Temporary relational anchoring; redistribution of housing risk within communities	Fragility; saturation; exposure to exploitation or control	Delays visible homelessness; sustains hidden homelessness; may reinforce long-term instability
Health and Social Services (CIUSSS)	Public institutional node intersecting housing risk	Referral and discharge points	Weak coordination with housing systems	Can reduce erosion if continuity exists; can intensify desynchronization when discharge lacks housing planning

These findings call for a shift from interpretations that attribute homelessness to individual or group characteristics, and toward an understanding of how institutional configurations shape housing trajectories.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations build on the mechanisms identified in Sections 5 and 6 and are grounded in the understanding that migrant homelessness is not a distinct or isolated issue, but part of broader systemic constraints affecting access to housing. They aim to reduce predictable gaps in the system and strengthen pathways toward stable housing.

The focus is on improving entry and referral processes, aligning institutional timelines with housing realities, reducing barriers in the private rental market, strengthening informational access, and incorporating a spatial perspective into service coordination.

7.1. Strengthen entry points and referrals to prevent gaps in service

The findings point to repeated breakdowns at moments of entry and transition—people are sent from one mandate to another, must repeat intakes, lose continuity in documents and communication, and fall into gaps when their situation does not match standardized eligibility categories. A first priority is therefore to build a cross-agency handoff protocol that functions as a “warm referral standard,” not merely a list of contacts. In practice, this means agreeing on a minimal handoff dataset (what must travel with the person), establishing a named handoff contact on both sides of the referral, and defining referral logic for frequent scenarios (new arrivals, late claims, family situations, safety risks, and imminent housing loss). A small inter-agency working group can operationalize this quickly by focusing on the few transitions that generate the most system bounce.

In addition to strengthening inter-agency handoffs, the system needs targeted entry-point information at key arrival sites—particularly the airport and other first-contact locations—so asylum seekers receive clear, multilingual guidance on what to do immediately, where to go, and what documentation and steps are required to avoid early misrouting and preventable exposure to homelessness.

Because a significant share of cases occurs in “grey zones” (late claims, administrative dead ends, non-status situations, or ambiguous eligibility), the system also requires navigation support that is explicitly designed for these circumstances. This requires clearer institutional design: it is a design problem: complex or ambiguous cases need early legal/administrative routing, safe disclosure practices, and referral pathways that minimize fear and misinformation. Concretely, partners should map existing legal/advocacy capacity, define standard referral triggers (e.g., imminent housing loss, safety risk, documentation gaps), and create a safe routing pathway that reduces time wasted in misdirected referrals.

Finally, a basic continuity support should become standard practice across shelters and newcomer services: stable contact points, support to maintain an address where needed, appointment tracking, safe document storage, and basic communications access. Continuity is the infrastructure that prevents small administrative breaks from becoming housing loss—and it is a feasible area for NHS-aligned support through program requirements and targeted resourcing.

Lead: Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / PRAIDA)

Partners: Ville de Montréal, shelter providers, settlement agencies, community organizations

7.2. Align administrative timelines with housing realities and urgency

A second priority is to confront the temporal mismatch that repeatedly emerges across migrant housing trajectories: institutional timelines (permits, appointments, francisation, hearings, confirmation letters, eligibility decisions) often do not match the pace and rigidity of the rental market, nor the time limits attached to many temporary accommodation arrangements. In practice, this means that individuals may be expected to secure housing before they have the documents, income stability, language capacity, or market access

required to do so. As a result, housing instability becomes predictable rather than exceptional. Recommendations here therefore frame time alignment as a core policy and service design parameter.

This challenge should not be underestimated. Immigration processes involve multiple jurisdictions and legal obligations, while housing systems operate under very different market logics shaped by vacancy rates, landlord screening practices, and limited affordable supply. Temporary accommodation programs are also constrained by capacity pressures, funding limits, and turnover requirements. Full synchronization is unlikely. The practical objective is therefore not perfect alignment, but the creation of flexible transition mechanisms that reduce the housing consequences of predictable delays.

A specific institutional lever concerns PRAIDA's hosting and operational policies, which stakeholders describe as insufficiently adapted to current arrival volumes and longer stabilization trajectories. A focused policy and operational review—covering eligibility rules, duration limits, re-admission practices, and coordination with downstream housing pathways—should be prioritized so that PRAIDA's mandate and procedures better reflect contemporary realities and reduce foreseeable returns to precarious housing arrangements. This review is specifically relevant given that PRAIDA is presently operating with more than 70% of unused resources.

Temporary accommodation should include an explicit and coordinated bridging function when the private market cannot absorb exits within the available time window. This may require modest extensions, transitional units, or reserved bridge capacity tied to active case management and housing search support. Such measures should remain linked to clear stabilization pathways rather than becoming open-ended warehousing.

In parallel, administrative “fast lanes” should be created where housing loss or safety risk is imminent—particularly in cases involving families with children, domestic violence, medical vulnerability, or situations where delayed paperwork predictably leads to eviction, exploitation, or homelessness. The objective is not to accelerate all processes indiscriminately, but to identify decision points where delays directly generate housing loss and intervene there first.

A practical rule should also be instituted: before any time-limited temporary stay expires, an exit plan should already exist and be actively supported. This implies formal planning checkpoints at set intervals during the stay, linked directly to a stabilization pathway (housing placement, income supports, legal follow-up, or bridge accommodation), rather than treating the expiry date as the moment planning begins. In a context of scarce housing supply, the system must shift from reacting at the point of discharge to initiating transitions early enough to prevent yet another forced relocation.

Lead: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec

Partners: PRAIDA, Ville de Montréal, housing providers

7.3. Improve access to clear, multilingual and reliable information

The results indicate that information and communication are not peripheral needs; they shape trajectories. When people do not know where to go, which rules apply, and how to navigate the city's service geography, they lose time, miss opportunities, and may be pushed into unsafe informal arrangements. The recommendations therefore treat informational access as an essential layer of stabilization.

First, the service ecosystem should produce an inter-agency operational handbook complemented by a user-facing multilingual guide or renew/adapt existing guides such as the carnet de route du CERDA. The operational component should reduce frontline uncertainty by clarifying referral routes, eligibility basics, expected timelines, and standardized handoff practices. The user-facing component should be designed for real-world circulation (including mobile-friendly formats) and should include not only “where services are,” but how to navigate the city: transit guidance, key nodes and corridors, and practical cues about neighbourhood geographies that affect access to work, safety, and services.

Second, a simple, regularly updated service-navigation map should be developed and maintained—both as a simple web resource and as printable materials—focusing on key nodes and practical instructions (hours, access rules, language availability, transportation).

Third, Access to Wi-Fi and charging stations at key service locations would support continuity. If people rely on phones for communication, navigation, and administrative continuity, then Wi-Fi and charging become stabilizing infrastructure. This should be implemented as a small-scale pilot with clear evaluation criteria: select 5–10 service nodes in collaboration with partners, install Wi-Fi and charging infrastructure, and monitor key indicators such as usage, missed appointments, and referral breakdowns.

Lead: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) + Gouvernement du Québec (PRAIDA / MSSS)

Partners: Aéroports de Montréal, Ville de Montréal, community organizations, settlement agencies, digital service providers

7.4. Expand access to rental housing through market mediation

The results emphasized that migrant homelessness is often produced inside the rental market through exclusion filters: guarantors, credit history, documentation, status uncertainty, and discrimination. Expanding supply alone will not resolve these barriers; it must also create institutional mechanisms that help newcomers meet standard rental requirements and reduce the risk perceived by landlords. A central recommendation is therefore to scale market mediation through risk-reduction leasing and landlord engagement, using the Refugee Centre’s approach as a reference model.

In that model, the organization secures units in the private market, reduces landlord risk through up-front payment, and acts as a consistent intermediary for relationship management and conflict resolution. The program is not framed as emergency shelter but as a stabilization tool that creates an initial anchoring step and helps rebuild rental credibility. IRCC can support the scaling of this model by prioritizing funding streams that build (i) nonprofit leasing/intermediation capacity and (ii) the operational backbone needed to manage landlord relations, cohabitation, and mediation.

Scaling this approach requires bridge capital (or equivalent guarantee instruments) that enable risk-reducing arrangements such as up-front payments or deposit/guarantee mechanisms. A revolving fund—supported by financial institutions, municipal/provincial partners, and potentially philanthropic or financial actors—would allow this approach to grow beyond small-scale pilots while maintaining accountability through clear eligibility and use criteria. In addition, a standardized landlord engagement package should be developed: template agreements, a single point of contact, incident procedures, and predictable expectations around maintenance and conflict resolution. The objective is to make participation easy and low-risk for landlords, while protecting tenants from exploitative conditions. Finally, market mediation must include safe pathways to address discrimination and exploitation. People must be able to report housing abuse and receive accompaniment without increasing fear linked to status or institutional contact.

Lead: Société d’habitation du Québec (SHQ) + IRCC

Partners: Financial institutions, nonprofit housing organizations, municipalities, landlord associations

7.5. Shift from emergency stays to lasting housing solutions

A key takeaway is that temporary systems can prevent immediate street homelessness, yet still sustain prolonged precarity if they do not lead to durable exits. The recommendations therefore prioritize stabilization as the central “headline” goal: shifting the system from emergency containment toward pathways for long-term housing stability.

This transition is challenging and should not be presented as a simple program adjustment. Montréal’s low-vacancy rental market, rising rents, landlord screening practices, and the shortage of affordable units

significantly constrain exits from shelters and temporary accommodation. In addition, many migrants face unstable income, incomplete documentation, language barriers, and limited rental history, while community organizations often lack the long-term operational funding required to sustain intensive follow-up. The objective is therefore not to eliminate emergency stays altogether, but to progressively increase the share of exits that lead to stable housing outcomes.

A structured stabilization pathway can be implemented through transitional renting (often six to eight months) that is explicitly designed as an anchoring step and then a bridge to an independent lease. The Refugee Centre program demonstrates how a nonprofit can combine private-market access, risk reduction for landlords, and structured transitional agreements to build rental history and stability in Montreal. Housing, Federal housing actors (e.g., Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC)) and partners should treat this as a promising practice that can be expanded or replicated, rather than as an isolated case. Moreover, more funding and support could be attributed to organizations like Foyer du Monde or Le Pont, which offer quality transitional housing until people are integrated into permanent housing

To reduce breakdowns, matching and cohabitation standards should be formalized. In shared living environments, housing stability is partly produced through compatibility, clear expectations, and credible mediation. Rather than relying on ad hoc judgment, pathway operators should use structured matching criteria (including language and gender considerations where appropriate), provide orientation to shared-living rules, and maintain a mediation protocol that prevents avoidable exits.

Housing stabilization also requires coordinated supports. Administrative guidance, legal referrals, practical orientation, and continuity support should be sequenced around the first 90 days of housing stability, when routines and administrative traction are being rebuilt. Employability and income support must be treated as a core pillar of sustainability. When exits from transitional housing occur without income stabilization, the pathway risks producing a cycle of “anchoring and relapse.” Linkages to job readiness, placement, and schedule-compatible language training should therefore be embedded as part of the pathway rather than treated as optional add-ons. Finally, to make community-based housing initiatives sustainable at scale, NHS-aligned funding should prioritize multi-year operational capacity (leasing, mediation, follow-up), not only short-term placements.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + SHQ

Partners: HICC, nonprofit housing providers, employment agencies

7.6. Make safety and gender explicit housing design criteria

The results make clear that housing precarity is not gender-neutral and that a substantial share of migrant homelessness is hidden within unsafe “private” arrangements shaped by coercion, violence, and dependency. Recommendations must therefore treat safety, privacy, and continuity as explicit criteria in both temporary and transitional housing design. A safe routing pathway should be established for women facing violence and/or severe status-related fear, including clear referral triggers and safe disclosure practices at frontline points of contact. In addition, minimum standards for privacy and safety should be incorporated into funding and operational requirements for temporary and transitional accommodation, so that housing solutions do not inadvertently reproduce exposure to harm. Frontline staff across sectors should receive a minimum training package on safe disclosure, risk identification, and referral practice.

Finally, the system requires low-threshold, confidential resources and routing pathways for non-status migrants, who are often excluded from mainstream supports and face heightened risk of exploitation and hidden homelessness. This includes safe points of contact, early legal/administrative orientation, and housing-related supports that do not penalize people for lacking documentation, while maintaining clear protections around confidentiality and fear of enforcement.

Lead: Gouvernement du Québec (MSSS / ministère responsable de la condition féminine)

Partners: Women’s shelters, migrant-serving organizations, municipalities

7.7. Improve measurement of hidden homelessness

Because migrant homelessness is frequently hidden, planning based solely on visible homelessness will remain reactive. The system needs a measurement layer capable of capturing early housing precarity and trajectory dynamics beyond shelters and street counts. This can be done without heavy or invasive data systems by complementing measurement through peripheral systems that encounter hidden precarity: schools, community clinics, food banks, places of worship, and newcomer organizations. A minimal set of trajectory indicators should be defined and tracked—forced mobility, system bounce, missed appointments linked to transport or communications barriers, and storage insecurity. Stabilization pathways should include systematic opt-in follow-up at three, six, and twelve months after exit, enabling learning about housing retention and preventing the loss of long-term outcomes to anecdote.

Lead: Statistics Canada + Institut de la statistique du Québec

Partners: Ville de Montréal, universities, community organizations

7.8. Adopt a spatial approach: better connect services across the city to support housing stability

The findings indicate that trajectories are spatially organized: resources cluster in particular nodes, services require travel and timing coordination, and dispersal patterns (including dispersed leased units) create logistical burdens that translate directly into missed appointments and delayed stabilization. Recommendations should therefore include a territorial strategy.

This objective is complex and should not be understood as a simple redistribution of services across the city. Existing organizations are already embedded in specific neighbourhoods, leases, and institutional catchment areas, while funding streams and mandates are often sector-specific rather than territorially coordinated. Transit travel times, service hours, language accessibility, and neighbourhood acceptance can also limit relocation or expansion. In addition, private-market housing opportunities often emerge where units are available rather than where services are concentrated. The practical goal is therefore not to redesign the urban system from scratch, but to better connect existing assets and reduce the spatial frictions that undermine stabilization.

The first step is to identify three to five priority hubs where service coordination can be intensified—through co-location where possible, or through functional coordination where physical co-location is not feasible. These hubs should build on existing concentrations of services rather than require entirely new infrastructures. Second, “service corridors” should be defined through a transit and walkability lens, aligning opening hours, appointment schedules, and access rules with real mobility constraints. Third, leasing-based stabilization programs that rely on dispersed private units should incorporate locational criteria—prioritizing proximity to hubs, transit access, and employment corridors where feasible—to reduce the spatial costs that undermine stabilization.

Rather than pursuing idealized spatial planning, the emphasis should be on incremental coordination: using mapping, scheduling alignment, mobility supports, and locational incentives to make the current service landscape function more effectively for households navigating housing and sometimes legal precarity.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain (ARTM)

Partners: CIUSSS/CISSS, community organizations, SHQ

7.9. Phase in reforms to move from emergency responses to long-term stability

Implementation should proceed in phases that balance early implementation steps with structural change. In the first six months, the priority is to pilot the cross-agency handoff protocol (including a minimal handoff dataset), implement a minimal continuity package, and deliver initial informational infrastructure (operational handbook and first navigation map), alongside matching/mediation standards for transitional shared housing and the identification of priority hubs. Over six to eighteen months, the focus should shift to scaling market mediation: establishing bridge capital, expanding leasing and intermediation capacity modeled on the Refugee Centre approach, operationalizing stabilization renting pathways, integrating employability supports, and deploying targeted connectivity at key nodes. Beyond eighteen months, the territorial strategy should be consolidated through hub-and-corridor implementation and iterative adjustments based on monitoring evidence, with the goal of shifting the system from emergency containment to durable stabilization.

Lead: Ville de Montréal + Gouvernement du Québec

Partners: HICC, SHQ, PRAIDA, community organizations, housing providers

7.10. Remove barriers to formal employment to support housing stabilization

Stable income is a critical condition for achieving and maintaining housing stability. Yet many migrants face persistent barriers to entering the formal labour market, including delayed work authorization, limited recognition of foreign credentials, lack of local experience, language challenges, and employer risk perceptions. These obstacles prolong financial insecurity and restrict access to rental housing, increasing the likelihood of prolonged precarity. Access to employment should therefore be considered a core component of housing stabilization.

This objective is important but challenging to achieve quickly. Labour market entry depends on multiple systems that are not always aligned: federal immigration processes determine work authorization, provincial bodies regulate professions and credential recognition, and employers respond to market conditions, perceived risk, and hiring capacity. In addition, many migrants must balance job search efforts with housing instability, childcare responsibilities, transportation costs, or mandatory appointments related to immigration and settlement processes. Employment access is therefore not a single policy lever, but a coordination challenge across institutions.

Governments and partners should strengthen structured pathways to employment by formalizing partnerships between community organizations and employers to facilitate faster entry into the workforce, particularly in occupations where rapid onboarding is feasible. Expanding these initiatives to regions experiencing labour shortages could further accelerate income security while easing pressure on metropolitan housing markets, provided relocation supports and housing options are in place. Complementary measures—such as streamlined credential recognition, targeted bridge training, paid work placements, and flexible language programs compatible with employment schedules—would improve sustainability.

The practical aim is not immediate labour market integration for all newcomers, but earlier and more realistic access to stable income pathways that reduce reliance on temporary supports and increase the likelihood of durable housing outcomes.

Lead: IRCC + Emploi-Québec / Services Québec

Partners: Employers, chambers of commerce, community organizations

7.11 Reframe migrant homelessness through a process-based institutional lens

Policy responses should move beyond viewing homelessness among migrants primarily as the result of isolated life events. The findings suggest that migrant homelessness often unfolds gradually, shaped by administrative delays, eligibility rules, fragmented referrals, and barriers in the rental market. Many migrants do not lose housing after a clear rupture; rather, they struggle to secure stable anchoring upon arrival and face narrowing pathways over time. Recognizing this pattern would support earlier identification of risk and encourage policies focused on continuity, coordination, and stabilization rather than late-stage crisis response.

This reframing, however, presents different challenges for different actors. Governments often organize programs through separate mandates—immigration, housing, income support, health, or homelessness—which can make cumulative trajectories difficult to see across administrative silos. Municipal actors may primarily encounter visible homelessness in public space and therefore prioritize emergency responses, encampments, and shelter pressures rather than upstream housing precarity. Service providers frequently respond to urgent daily needs and may have limited capacity for longitudinal case tracking or cross-sector coordination. Researchers and data agencies often rely on shelter use, point-in-time counts, or program-specific datasets that undercapture hidden homelessness and fragmented trajectories.

Addressing this challenge requires shared analytical tools and common indicators across systems. Governments should integrate prevention metrics tied to early housing precarity, not only crisis entries. Municipalities should complement visible homelessness indicators with measures of hidden and family homelessness. Service providers should be supported to document pathways and referral outcomes, not only service volumes. Universities and policy research organizations can help develop trajectory-based evidence frameworks that allow institutions to identify where misalignment produces avoidable housing loss.

The objective is not merely conceptual change, but a practical shift in how problems are detected, measured, and governed so that intervention occurs earlier and system responses become more coherent.

Lead: HICC + Gouvernement du Québec + Ville de Montréal

Partners: Universities, service providers, policy research organizations

8. CONCLUSIONS

This report set out to document and better understand a growing but still insufficiently recognized reality: migrant homelessness in Montreal. While homelessness and immigration have each generated substantial research and policy attention in Canada, their intersection remains comparatively underexplored. Yet the findings of this study suggest that migrant homelessness is no longer a marginal or temporary phenomenon.

The evidence gathered through interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, and review of available statistics points to a central conclusion: migrant homelessness is rarely the result of a single rupture or personal failure. Rather, it is more accurately understood as the cumulative outcome of institutional misalignment. Immigration timelines, housing markets, service eligibility rules, administrative procedures, and labour market integration processes often operate according to different logics and timeframes. When these systems fail to connect effectively, housing instability becomes predictable. Many migrants do not “fall” suddenly into homelessness. Instead, they arrive without secure residential anchoring and progressively move through a series of precarious arrangements that can culminate in emergency shelter use, hidden homelessness, or prolonged instability.

This insight has important implications for how homelessness is conceptualized. Traditional frameworks in Canada have often emphasized visible homelessness, chronic shelter use, addiction, mental health crises, and public-space occupation. While these realities remain critically important, they do not fully capture migrant trajectories. In many cases, migrant homelessness generally is less visible, more family-based, more gendered, and more spatially dispersed. It frequently unfolds through overcrowded and substandard apartments, temporary stays with acquaintances, informal subletting, unstable shared housing, or repeated displacement between short-term accommodations. Such situations may not appear in street counts, yet they involve genuine housing insecurity and often significant hardship.

Montreal provides a particularly important context for understanding these dynamics. As one of Canada’s principal immigrant-receiving cities, and as a metropolitan area facing severe affordability pressures and low rental vacancy rates, Montreal concentrates many of the structural tensions that shape migrant housing precarity. It is also a city where emergency systems, community organizations, immigrant-serving agencies, and municipal actors have had to adapt to rapidly changing realities. The research highlights the substantial efforts already being made across these sectors. In many cases, homelessness services have responded to migrant needs even when this was not their original mandate, while settlement organizations have expanded their role to include housing assistance and crisis navigation. These adaptations have prevented far worse outcomes. However, they also reveal that the current system relies heavily on institutional improvisation.

A second major conclusion concerns the importance of hidden homelessness. Existing measurement systems rely heavily on shelter use data and point-in-time counts. These tools remain valuable, but they capture only part of the phenomenon. Migrants who avoid shelters, remain temporarily with relatives, accept exploitative arrangements, or move frequently between unstable accommodations often remain statistically invisible. Women, children, families, and persons with precarious status may be particularly represented in these hidden forms. If policy is based only on visible homelessness, a significant share of need remains unrecognized. Better data systems and broader definitions of housing precarity are therefore essential.

The findings also underscore that housing stabilization cannot be separated from employment, legal status, language acquisition, transportation, and urban geography. Stable housing is not produced by shelter alone. It depends on income pathways, access to documents, mobility across the city, trust in institutions, and the ability to navigate fragmented systems. For this reason, migrant homelessness should not be treated solely as a homelessness-sector issue. It is simultaneously a housing issue, an immigration issue, a labour-market issue, and a governance issue. Effective responses will require coordination across these domains.

The recommendations presented in this report are grounded in that broader understanding. They call for stronger referral systems at entry points, better alignment between administrative timelines and housing realities, multilingual information tools, rental-market mediation, transitional pathways toward independent housing, gender-sensitive supports, improved measurement of hidden homelessness, territorial coordination of services, employment access, and a process-based policy lens. None of these measures alone will solve migrant homelessness. Together, however, they outline a more coherent direction: shifting from emergency containment toward prevention, continuity, and durable stabilization.

Finally, this study suggests that migrant homelessness should be understood not as evidence of failed integration by individuals, but as evidence of systems that have not yet adapted sufficiently to contemporary mobility. In that sense, migrant homelessness serves as a diagnostic lens. It reveals where institutions disconnect, where housing markets exclude, and where policy timelines fail to match lived realities. Responding effectively will require political will, intergovernmental coordination, and sustained investment. But it will also require a change in perspective: from managing visible crisis after it appears, to preventing cumulative precarity before it hardens into homelessness. That shift may ultimately benefit not only migrants, but the broader homelessness response system as a whole.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW / FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEW GUIDES

Homeless migrant interviewees

Tombstone questions

- Name or other identifier, to be asked before the recording begins
- Age
- Sex/gender
- Country of origin
- Languages used
- Time in Canada
- Time in Montreal

Migration history

Could you please tell us why you chose to come to Canada rather than another country?

Similarly, why did you choose to come to Montreal rather than another city in Canada?

When you first arrived in Canada, did you know anyone in this country? Did you have family members here or friends or colleagues? Did you come to Canada with family members?

When you first arrived in Montreal, did you know anyone in this city? Did you have family members, friends, or colleagues here?

Do you think about leaving Montreal and going to another place? Do you think of leaving Canada to return to your homeland or to travel to another country?

Homelessness history

When you first arrived in Montreal, did you have accommodations? If yes, in which neighbourhood? What type of building? Did you share this accommodation with another person(s)?

If you had accommodations, what happened such that you became homeless?

For how long have you been homeless?

Where do you find shelter at night? In a homeless shelter? In an encampment? On the street? With friends or relatives? In a public building such as a transit station, library, shopping mall? How do you go about finding shelter?

Do you feel safe where you spend the night?

How do you go about finding the necessities of life such as food, clothing, cell phone service, medicines, etc.?

Where do you obtain food? A homeless shelter? Food bank? A grocery store? Restaurant?

Do you have a source of income?

What support systems and networks do you use to find accommodations, food, and the other necessities of life? Have you received advice from either immigration lawyers, consultants, or others who have helped you?

Have you ever used a tent city/encampment for shelter? Were you accepted there? Did you receive support? Were there any hostile reactions to your being a migrant on the part of those living there longer term?

Use of the city

During the day, where and how do you spend your time?

Do you move to and from different parts of the city?

Do you use public spaces such as shopping malls, libraries, cafes and restaurants, parks, sidewalks and roadsides?

Do you meet other people during the day? If yes, where do you gather? Public spaces? Someone's home? Shelters for the homeless?

Do you have a support network of either other migrants or other homeless persons or social services organizations?

If you use social service organizations for support, where do you gain access to their services? Do you need to travel far to use their services?

Are there areas of the city where you will not go because you feel unwelcome or frightened?

How do you move from one place to another? Walk? Bicycle? Public transit? Taxi/Uber?

If you were provided accommodation, in which part of the city would you prefer it to be? What would make one neighbourhood preferable to others? Proximity to people you know? Services? Public transit? Would you prefer the downtown area? An inner suburban area? An outer suburban area?

Hopes for the future

As a newcomer to Canada, what are your hopes for the future? What is the most important change that you would like to see in your life in Canada? A job? A stable home?

What is the most important barrier now to your achieving your hopes?

Institutional interviewees (Local NGO representatives, community association representatives, etc.)

Assessment of homelessness among migrants in Montreal

Does your organization believe that homelessness among migrants is prevalent or relatively rare? To the extent that migrants are among Montreal's homeless population, are there characteristics that are more common than others, such as age, sex, immigration status, country of origin, arriving with family members or alone, other common characteristics?

To the extent that homelessness among migrants exists, does your organization track the trends in this phenomenon? If yes, where does it receive information about these trends? If yes, what do the trends show with regard to immigration/visa status? Duration of homelessness? Health conditions?

If your organization offers direct services to homeless persons, what percentage of these persons are migrants? If your organization is a shelter for the homeless, what percentage of your residents are migrants? Does this percentage vary during the year? Are there patterns to this variation?

Services provided

Has your organization been able to assess the specific needs of homeless migrants? If yes, what conclusions did you draw?

Does your organization follow the personal trajectories of individual homeless migrants, for example, to ensure their health and safety? If yes, what are some of the challenges in doing this sort of work? What insights did you gain from following these personal trajectories?

Does your organization assist homeless migrants to find shelter? Food? Employment? Access to services? If yes, do you have sufficient capacity to serve the needs of these clients?

Is your organization involved with homeless encampments? If yes, in what ways?

Is your organization located near to where homeless migrants spend their time both during the day and at night? Please give us the address of your offices.

Does your organization work with formal or informal representatives of the homeless migrant population in Montreal? Does your organization work with the governments of the City of Montreal, the province of Quebec, or the Government of Canada? If yes, please describe these working relationships.

What are the needs of your organization to better serve a clientele of homeless migrants?

Government interviewees (City of Montreal, Province of Quebec, Government of Canada)

Questions of mandate

Does your organization have a formal mandate with regard to homelessness in the City of Montreal? Please describe this mandate and its parameters if yes. Does your organization work with other organizations within your jurisdiction and with organizations at other levels of government? If yes, could you please describe these working relationships.

Please describe the main responsibilities of your organization with respect to homelessness, the well-being of migrants, and migrant homelessness.

Assessment of the problem of migrant homelessness in Montreal

To what extent does your department assess and monitor homelessness as experienced by migrants to Canada? Does your organization collect its own data or rely on other organizations for this information?

Does your organization consider homelessness among migrants to be a significant aspect of the general problem of homelessness in Montreal? Please explain.

Does your organization consult with homeless migrants regularly, sometimes, or not at all?

What does your organization consider to be the principal reason for homelessness among migrants in Montreal?

Services offered

Does your organization offer services specifically for migrants who are homeless? If so, from where does it offer these services? What is your organization's catchment area for your homeless migrant clients? All of Montreal, the downtown core, inner suburbs, outer suburbs?

Are your offices located near to where homeless persons in general and homeless migrants in particular spend their days and nights?

How does your organization regard the use of public spaces by homeless migrants both during the day and at night? Does your organization have a good sense of where and how homeless migrants spend their time?

Are there gaps in services that exacerbate the difficulty that homeless migrants face in finding stable shelter and in meeting their other basic needs?

In the opinion of your organization, what are the most effective measures needed in the short term to manage the problem of homelessness among migrants?

What does your organization regard as a successful solution to this problem in the short to medium term.

APPENDIX B. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography was primarily prepared by Arturo Valladares, Ph.D. The Liquid Space Lab (LSL) research team contributed by reviewing the material and complementing selected references.

The documents analyzed in this bibliography offer a strategic perspective on the phenomenon of homelessness among immigrants. In order to facilitate navigation through the bibliography, each item in the bibliography has been assigned one or two thematic descriptors or keywords. Below, the reader will find a list of descriptors. The order in which the items appear in the bibliography closely follows this list.

Statistics about homelessness across Canada; statistics about homelessness in Québec; statistics of homelessness in Montréal; homelessness trends in Montréal; statistics on homelessness among immigrants; statistics on homelessness among migrants; homelessness among immigrants; homelessness among migrants; homelessness among asylum seekers; homelessness mitigation; stakeholders coordination across sectors and levels; homelessness risks factors; migratory status as homelessness risk factor; homelessness risk factors among immigrants; homelessness risk factors among migrants; links between migratory status and access to services; migrants participation in the community; migrants access to housing; hidden homelessness; hidden homelessness in Canada; risk factors of hidden homelessness; homelessness experience; housing market discrimination; culturally sensitive housing; social support as a drain; homeless enumerating methodologies; homelessness prevention; Federal Government public policy; refugees' integration into mainstream society; inter-regional homeless mobility; homelessness policy; climate change and homelessness; homelessness, ICTs and social media; chronic and cyclical homelessness.

Ministry of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities (2025). Homelessness Data Snapshot: Homelessness and immigration in Canada from 2020 – 2023. Government of Canada. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/alt-format/pdf/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/homelessness-immigration-2020-2023-litinerance-immigration-en.pdf>

(Statistics about homelessness across Canada; Homelessness risk factors among immigrants)

Using quantitative data from surveys conducted at shelters, the Government of Canada describes the phenomenon of homelessness within immigrant communities. The report establishes that while immigrants are not necessarily overrepresented in the population using emergency shelters, one particular immigrant category (i.e., asylum seekers) is. Although they constitute 0.8% of the general population, they make up 2.6% of emergency shelter users. The report also examines the causes of homelessness among immigrants. While a lack of sufficient income is the most frequent cause of homelessness, the report reveals that conflicts among spouses or partners, as well as with landlords, are significant determinants of housing loss. Another revealing fact is that substance abuse, the most significant single cause of homelessness among Canadian citizens, is a far less significant reason for housing loss among newcomers.

Tria Espinoza, F & Randle, J. (2025). Sortir de l'itinérance : examen des facteurs contribuant à la récupération et à la conservation d'un logement. Statistique Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/46-28-0001/2025001/article/00002-fra.htm>

(Homelessness mitigation strategy; homelessness mitigation factors)

This report examines the factors that have helped the Federal Government's Strategy to help lift people out of homelessness. The authors identify three groups of factors including: (a) financial factors, such as

obtaining a new job or increasing employment income; (b) non-financial factors, such as accessing social services; and, (c) access to subsidized housing.

The report uses quantitative methods (i.e. a survey of people succeeding at exiting homelessness) to determine the degree to which each of the above-mentioned factors has had an impact in helping the strategy succeed.

The report provides definitions of key concepts such as: unsheltered homelessness, sheltered homelessness, hidden homelessness, indigenous homelessness, and chronic homelessness.

Gouvernement du Québec. (2024). Montreal's 2022 point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness: General Overview. Gouvernement du Québec.
https://ccsmtlpro.ca/sites/mtlpro/files/media/document/2024_07_11_Pub_DenombrementPersonnel_tineranceMtl_2022_PortraitGeneralEN.pdf

(Statistics of homelessness in Montréal; statistics on homelessness among migrants)

Focusing on Montreal, the report is the product of an enumeration of visible homelessness carried out across 13 jurisdictions of Quebec on the night of October 11, 2022. According to fieldwork, there were 4,690 people living in homelessness in Montreal. This represents an increase of 33% compared with the previous count in 2018. Out of the 4,690 people found to be living in visible homelessness, 20% were immigrants. More precisely, 2% were refugees, 2% were refugee claimants, 13% had status as landed immigrants, while the other 2% mentioned having a different migrant status. A revealing fact of the study is that, compared to the 2018 exercise, more people living in homelessness were employed. The results presented in the study is the product of a survey and statistical analyses.

Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM). (2025). Final report: Homelessness and Social Cohabitation in Montreal (Itinérance et cohabitation sociale à Montréal). Montréal: OCPM.
<https://ocpm.qc.ca/>

(Homelessness trends in Montréal; homelessness among immigrants; hidden homelessness; policy recommendations)

This comprehensive public consultation report, published in June 2025, presents an updated picture of homelessness in Montreal, highlighting a 33% increase in visible homelessness between 2018 and 2022. The OCPM identifies structural drivers such as the housing crisis, inflation, economic precarity, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as key contributors to this rise. Of particular relevance to this project, the report documents a growing presence of immigrants, particularly asylum seekers, among people using emergency and temporary shelters, as well as a significant and underreported prevalence of hidden homelessness (including overcrowding and informal living arrangements), especially among migrants.

The OCPM highlights the need for culturally and linguistically adapted services, emphasizing barriers related to discrimination, language, unfamiliarity with the local system, and limited social networks. The report also stresses the importance of decentralizing homelessness resources to reduce localized social tensions, enhancing community engagement before opening new facilities, and shifting away from punitive and security-focused responses in favor of proactive mediation and social inclusion.

Key policy recommendations from the OCPM include equitable territorial distribution of resources, increased intersectoral and intergovernmental collaboration, inclusion of people with lived experience in service planning, and a greater focus on empirical research regarding migrants' use of informal networks and digital technologies for survival and housing access.

Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérants de Montréal. (2025). Constats et pistes d'action en itinérance à Montréal. Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal. https://rapsim.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Memoire-OCPM_RAPSIM_fevrier-2025.pdf

(Homelessness trends in Montréal; homelessness among migrants)

In this policy brief, RAPSIM, a regrouping of community organizations in Montréal, invites all stakeholders to adopt a global approach to the problem of homelessness. Such an approach involves looking at all the interconnected factors associated with the issue. The arguments presented in the brief are the product of a consultation process involving 104 organizations.

In general, RAPSIM observes that homelessness has increased at a faster pace than the amount of financial resources allocated to community organizations working on the issue. The brief also proposes several goals, notably building 22,500 social housing units in five years and working towards achieving that 20% of Montreal housing becomes social housing by 2050.

RAPSIM notes a strong increase in the number of requests for help coming from migrants with precarious legal status. The regrouping also observes that both the Federal and Provincial Governments have the power to act but rarely take any responsibility.

Hanley, J. & Bourdeau, F. (2025). Prévention de l'itinérance des personnes immigrantes à Montréal et amélioration de leur accès aux services : essentiel à la cohabitation sociale. Office de Consultation Publique de Montréal. https://ocpm.qc.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/P130/8-66_Universite%CC%81%20McGill%20et%20ROHMI.pdf

(Homelessness risk factors among migrants; links between migratory status and access to services)

In this policy brief presented to the public consultation on homelessness of the City of Montreal, Hanley and Bourdeau discuss the causes leading to an increase in homelessness among migrants, particularly among asylum seekers. Other identified groups include temporary workers, international students, and persons without status. The brief is supported by an extensive review of the literature.

The authors identify several homelessness risk factors. These are: the relationship with the health and social services systems; lack of a social network; linguistic challenges; and, systemic racism and discrimination. The authors outline recommendations to the City of Montreal and the Government of Quebec. These include educating agents and mediators working in the field of homelessness about the relevant laws and strengthening the sheltering facilities where migrants are welcomed.

Samari, D., & Groot, S. (2023). Potentially exploring homelessness among refugees: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, 32(1), 135-150. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10530789.2021.1995935>

(Homelessness among migrants; homelessness risks factors)

In this article, Samari and Groot explore the issue of homelessness among refugees. Using meta-analysis techniques for the section and review of academic literature produced in the field, their study reveals that this particular issue has been mostly studied in Canada, Australia, the UK, and the US.

The authors state that homelessness among refugees is the result of a complex interplay between individual characteristics and structural factors. Refugee families often face psychological distress. Examples

mentioned in the literature include re-composed families, overcrowded houses, family violence, family conflict, family trauma, parental separation, single parenthood, family poverty, lack of support networks, family expectations, and differing rates of acculturation. At the same time, the authors identify macro-socioeconomic factors leading to homelessness, including poverty, housing unaffordability, labor exploitation, and punitive governmental policies. The authors conclude that, to some degree, there is a bidirectional relationship between homelessness and these structural factors.

ÉRIQA. (2024). Homelessness, Housing, and Precarious Migration: New Challenges. Équipe de Recherche sur l’immigration au Québec et ailleurs. <https://eriqua.org/logementmigration/>

(Homelessness among asylum seekers; Statistics about homelessness in Canada)

This policy brief, published by Équipe de Recherche sur l’immigration au Québec et ailleurs (ÉRIQA), regroups findings from a panel held at the 2024 Metropolis Conference. It summarizes the findings of four homelessness experts coming from the community sector and academia.

The emphasis of the brief is on homelessness among asylum seekers. According to the reports produced by the shelters of the City of Toronto, their number has increased by 500% between 2021 and 2023.

The brief sets forth several recommendations to address the crises. Among them: (a) to increase collaboration between the homeless and migration sectors; (b) to modify eligibility criteria and deadlines to access the PRAIDA housing services; and (c) to replace the National Interim Housing Assistance Program for asylum seekers with a sustainable three-year duration program.

Gouvernement du Québec. (2021). S’allier devant l’itinérance : plan d’action interministériel en itinérance 2021-2026. Gouvernement du Québec. <https://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/msss/fichiers/2021/21-846-01W.pdf>

(Homelessness risks factors; migratory status as homelessness risk factor)

In 2021, the Government of Quebec published its plan to mitigate and counter homelessness. Following an understanding that the issue is linked to social exclusion, the plan establishes 14 actions structured around three axes: prevention, accompaniment, and policies across sectors. The plan is supported on the review of pertinent literature, statistical methods and consultation of stakeholders.

The Quebec interministerial plan acknowledges the complexity of homelessness and that certain forms of social exclusion are linked to the issue. Vulnerabilities and stigma associated with different groups, such as Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, the elderly, and those living with disabilities, are acknowledged as factors that accentuate the issue of homelessness. The plan also explicitly acknowledges migratory status as a risk factor for homelessness.

Gouvernement du Canada. (2015, Avril 24). Vers un chez-soi : La stratégie canadienne de lutte contre l’itinérance. Gouvernement du Canada. <https://logement-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/index-fra.html>

(Homelessness mitigation; stakeholders’ coordination across sectors and levels)

Through this website, the Canadian Federal Government establishes its strategy to combat homelessness. With a community approach, the strategy offers funding for projects tailored to an understanding of local

needs. The strategy is the product of reviewing literature, statistics and legislations as well as consultation with stakeholders.

The program is based on the recognition that the prevention and mitigation of homelessness require collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders, such as municipalities, community groups, and Indigenous communities. The website gathers several resources and reports, providing a general overview of the resources and the issue of homelessness in Canada.

De la Calzada-Calugay, R., & Hanley, J. (2024). Homelessness and housing insecurity among immigrants in Canada: A scoping review. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 33(1), 43-59.
<https://cjur.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/cjur/article/view/427>

(Homelessness among migrants)

This recent article by de la Calzada-Caluhay and Hanley presents the results of a meta-analysis of 52 Canadian studies on housing insecurity and homelessness among immigrants. According to the authors, homelessness among migrants is a growing problem in the context of the acute pan-Canadian housing crisis.

The study findings confirm that migrant experiences of housing insecurity must be understood intersectionally, with social location, discrimination, health, cultural and family considerations. Finally, the study finds that refugees are a group at a greater homelessness risk.

Smith, A., & Kopec, A. (2023). Mapping homelessness research in Canada. *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 53(1), 42-62.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02722011.2023.2170155>

(Homelessness research; homelessness risk factors)

The paper by Smith and Kopec presents a meta-analysis of research on homelessness in Canada. By conducting an in-depth literature review consisting of 251 papers, the study identifies gaps in the literature, including a lack of understanding of the structural and political causes of homelessness and the lack of attention to the phenomenon in small, northern, and suburban communities. The meta-analysis also delves into the correlation between mental health and homelessness. It has been assumed that having a mental health problem is a major risk factor for homelessness. However, it is also known that chronic homelessness often causes major mental disorders. This is a particularly relevant consideration when working with Indigenous communities who carry the psychological burden of intergenerational trauma and colonialism.

The major finding of the literature review is a systematic recommendation to better coordinate services across different sectors or levels of governance. It is noted that most contributions to the field come from the medical sciences and public health, while the political and social sciences in general have paid little attention to this subject of study.

Forchuk, C., Russell, G., Richardson, J., Perreault, C., Hassan, H., Lucyk, B., & Gyamfi, S. (2022). Family matters in Ontario: Understanding and addressing homelessness among newcomer families in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 54(1), 27-39.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0844562121998206>

(Homelessness risk factors among migrants; homelessness mitigation)

The study by Forchuk et al. is a current contribution to the understanding of the path towards homelessness among migrants to Canada. Situated within the ecosystem of social services in Ontario, it departs from traditional analysis by acknowledging three different categories or levels of homelessness: (a) absolutely unsheltered, (b) living in a shelter, and (c) at risk of homelessness due to poor economic or housing conditions.

Analysis of qualitative data obtained through follow-up with migrant families reveals four major themes associated with homelessness or homelessness risk: life changes, lack of understanding of the system, difficulty with conflict resolution, and escaping as a solution for hardship (i.e., exhausting present or available resources by relocating or searching for opportunities elsewhere).

Families also identified opportunities to mitigate homelessness risk among migrants. These include longer stays in shelters, increased social assistance, availability of affordable housing, and a more compassionate support system.

Polillo, A., & Sylvestre, J. (2021). An exploratory study of the pathways into homelessness among of foreign-born and Canadian-born families: a timeline mapping approach. *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, 30(1), 6-19.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10530789.2019.1705518>

(Homelessness risk factors among migrants)

By focusing on immigration status—such as permanent residents, asylum seekers, and refugees—Polillo and Sylvestre examine the pathways that lead immigrant families into homelessness. Using timeline mapping and qualitative interviews, their study uncovers not only the structural factors contributing to homelessness but also highlights the psychological stressors associated with migration. Families participating in the study describe how the trauma of fleeing unsafe conditions and the experience of social isolation increase their vulnerability to homelessness. The research underscores the interconnectedness of personal and financial instability, precarious housing situations, and the risk of homelessness.

Aubry, T., Agha, A., Mejia-Lancheros, C., Lachaud, J., Wang, R., Nisenbaum, R., Palepu, A., & Hwang, S. W. (2021). Housing Trajectories, Risk Factors, and Resources among Individuals Who Are Homeless or Precariously Housed. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 693(1), 102-122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716220987203>

(Homelessness risk factors)

The study analyzes the trajectories or pathways to homelessness in low-income single adults in three large Canadian cities. It follows the trajectories of adults over a four-year period. The author followed a prospective cohort panel study that examined the health and housing status of a representative sample of homeless and vulnerably housed single adults in three Canadian cities (Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver). Data analysis reveals four different pathways to homelessness: (a) high levels of sustained housing stability; (b) improving levels over time leading to high levels of housing stability; (c) decreasing levels of housing stability over time; and (d) low levels of housing stability over time.

The study seeks to provide evidence that homelessness is an economic problem caused by structural socio-economic reasons. In the case of Canada, according to the authors, the problem cannot be solved without addressing the housing affordability crisis.

Ville de Montréal. (2023). Echo 2023 : Le Baromètre de la Ville de Montréal sur l'inclusion des personnes immigrantes : Regard comparatif et intersectionnel (ADS+) des personnes immigrantes et des personnes non immigrantes montréalaises.
https://portailm4s.s3.montreal.ca/pdf/sondage_echo_le_barometre_sur_linclusion_des_personnes_immigrantes_a_montreal_2023.pdf

(Immigrant participation in the community; immigrants access to housing)

Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the City of Montreal published a recent portrait of the inclusion of immigrants in the community. The approach focuses on key aspects of integration such as housing, employment, perceived discrimination, support from a social network, and sense of belonging. To carry out the study, the results are compared across different categories: immigrant and non-immigrant, racialized and non-racialized. The study also considers other variables such as gender.

Some relevant findings include the fact that immigrants have more problems finding adequate housing or employment compared to non-immigrants. Similarly, immigrants are less likely to have a strong support network and are less likely to find Montreal to be a welcoming city. Finally, the proportion of immigrants who perceive themselves as having been unfairly treated or as victims of discrimination is much higher among immigrants than among non-immigrants.

Grimard, C. (2011). Les refuges pour hommes itinérants à Montréal, lieux de passage ou d'ancrage? Enquête sociologique sur une institution paradoxale. UQAM, Thèse.
<https://archipel.uqam.ca/4247/1/D2219.pdf>

(Homeless realities; reintegration to the community)

Written before the housing crisis in 2011, the doctoral dissertation by Grimard explores the landscape of homelessness among male adults in Montreal. By using qualitative methods, the author examines homeless experiences in three shelters: the Old Brewery Mission, the Welcome Hall, and La Maison du Père. The author investigates questions of reintegration into the community, such as the development of autonomy, sense of accomplishment, and responsibility in forming links of belonging with society.

The author states “We have seen how contemporary societies demand autonomy, the realisation for the self and responsibility in the development of social links and a sense of belonging to the world”. The study reveals that homeless men often fail to meet these demands, and their vulnerability forces institutions to take charge of them either partially or fully.

Reiser, C. (2020). Se loger dans un quartier tremplin : Trajectoires et stratégies résidentielles des familles immigrantes à Parc-Extension et Saint-Michel, Montréal. Thèse. Université de Montréal.
<https://umontreal.scholaris.ca/items/c7daa25f-ee9d-4ad9-9914-0de3161c65a1>

(Migrant access to housing; migrants' participation in the community)

Looking at the case of two deprived neighborhoods in Montreal, Reiser explores the pathways towards residential stability of migrant families in her doctoral research. The author describes residential landscapes in which, while the large majority of migrants are housed under precarious conditions in the private rental sector, others find pathways to stability by occupying social housing.

Through qualitative and participatory methods, Reiser illustrates immigrant capabilities to act in the face of barriers and navigate through the housing system in their quest for stability. The author concludes that in the current residential landscape, the most adapted households manage to obtain good-quality housing in the private rental sector, while the most vulnerable find alternatives in the social housing sector.

Gravel, Marie-Andrée. (2020). Itinérance cachée : définitions et mesures. Au Québec et à l'international, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec. [https://bdso.gouv.qc.ca/docs-ken/multimedia/PB01600FR Itinerance cachee2020H00F00.pdf](https://bdso.gouv.qc.ca/docs-ken/multimedia/PB01600FR%20Itinerance%20cachee2020H00F00.pdf)

(Hidden homelessness; homelessness among asylum seekers)

By reviewing policies and literature from different countries and regions, in this report published by the Institute of Statistics of Quebec, Gravel explores the different ways in which hidden homelessness is defined. She states that homelessness is “a rupture of the social contract” and an issue linked and intertwined with social exclusion. She examines the Canadian definition, according to which hidden homelessness occurs when people are “sheltered temporarily with others but without the warranty of continuity in their residence or access to permanent housing.” It should be noted that within the Canadian definition, new migrants living in welcoming facilities (i.e., asylum seekers sheltered under PRAIDA) are considered to fall within the definition of hidden homelessness. In Quebec, the phenomena of hidden homelessness and homelessness broadly are also characterized by situations of social rupture in which people have difficulties participating in a stable way within the community. Three forms of homelessness are identified: (a) situational, (b) cyclic, and (c) chronic.

Centraide du Grand Montréal. (2025, Avril 25). La face cachée de l'itinérance. Centraide du Grand Montréal. <https://www.centraide-mtl.org/bloque/la-face-cachee-de-litinerance/>

(Hidden homelessness)

This blog article by Centraide du Grand Montréal seeks to shed light on the problem of hidden homelessness in the city. Hidden homelessness is a phenomenon that is hard to measure and study. According to data accessed by Centraide, over 7% of Quebecers have experienced an incident of hidden homelessness, sometimes lasting for periods longer than a year.

The article identifies different forms of hidden homelessness, such as couchsurfing, sleeping in a car, temporarily staying with friends or family, overcrowding an apartment, living in a short-term establishment (e.g., motels, rooming houses), and staying in a place where violence persists. The facts presented in the blog are the product of journalistic techniques.

Deleu H, Schrooten M, Hermans K. Hidden Homelessness: A Scoping Review and Avenues for Further Inquiry. *Social Policy and Society*. 2023;22(2):282-298. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/social-policy-and-society/article/hidden-homelessness-a-scoping-review-and-avenues-for-further-inquiry/B7903859064D7D1CE406528B5FB4638D>

(Hidden homelessness)

This literature review by Deleu et al. seeks to shed light on the nature of hidden homelessness and the ways in which it has been approached in different developed countries. The authors acknowledge the lack of a unified hidden homelessness concept. However, they systematically argue that the roots of the problem rest in the fact that those experiencing the phenomenon rely on their own survival strategies and remain imperceptible to public policies and services.

Interestingly, people experiencing hidden homelessness may not perceive themselves as being homeless, and thus they remain invisible not only from services but from surveys and point-in-time counts

Kauppi, C., O'Grady, B., Schiff, R., & Martin, F. (2017). *Homelessness and hidden homelessness in rural and northern Ontario*. Guelph, ON: Rural Ontario Institute. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rebecca_Schiff2/publication/324755996_Homelessness_and_Hidden_Homelessness_in_Rural_and_Northern_Ontario/links/5ae08ca7aca272fdaf8c8390/Homelessness-and-Hidden-Homelessness-in-Rural-and-Northern-Ontario.pdf

(Hidden homelessness; homelessness experience)

In their book, Kauppi and colleagues explore the phenomenon of hidden homelessness in northern and rural Canada by combining a review of existing literature and statistical data with firsthand accounts from individuals who have experienced it. Their research identifies seven distinct forms of hidden homelessness: (a) living in tents or recreational vehicles; (b) residing in substandard housing; (c) occupying housing that is technically unaffordable; (c) couch surfing; (d) doubling up or living in overcrowded conditions; (e) engaging in survival sex for shelter; (f) staying in motels or single-room accommodations.

Although the authors primarily focus on Indigenous populations rather than migrants, they highlight how hidden homelessness is often linked to systemic discrimination against racialized communities.

Rodrigue, S. (2016) 'Hidden homelessness in Canada', *Insights on Canadian Society*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada. https://epe.bac-lac.gc.ca/100/201/301/weekly_acquisitions_list-ef/2016/16-47/publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/75-006-x/75-006-2016-12-eng.pdf?nodisclaimer=1

(Hidden homelessness in Canada; risk factors of hidden homelessness)

Using data from the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), Rodrigue presents a comprehensive portrait of hidden homelessness in Canada. In this study, hidden homelessness is defined as temporarily living with family or friends, in a car, or in other informal or insecure arrangements. According to the findings, 8% of Canadians aged 15 and over reported having experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives. In the same year, it was estimated that more than 235,000 Canadians would experience homelessness.

The study also explores the duration of these episodes. Among those who had experienced hidden homelessness, approximately 18% reported that it lasted at least one year. A majority, 55%, experienced it for more than one month but less than a year, while 27% reported episodes lasting less than one month.

Rodrigue further investigates the characteristics of individuals who had experienced hidden homelessness. The data show that Canadians with a history of childhood maltreatment were significantly more likely to report such experiences. For example, 25% of individuals who had been victims of sexual abuse had experienced hidden homelessness. The study also highlights the role of social support, revealing that individuals with lower levels of support were more vulnerable. Among those who had moved at least four times in the previous five years, 21% had experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives.

Finally, the study finds that Canadians with disabilities were disproportionately affected. Those reporting at least three disabilities were four times more likely to have experienced hidden homelessness (26%) compared to those with no reported disabilities (6%).

Springer, A. (2021, March 2). Living in Colour: Racialized Housing Discrimination in Canada. Research Matters Blog. <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2021/living-colour-racialized-housing-discrimination-canada/>

(Housing market discrimination; culturally sensitive housing)

In this blog article, the author advocates for culturally sensitive housing and stronger efforts to combat discrimination in the rental market as strategies to prevent homelessness among newcomers to Canada. The article highlights the experiences of isolation, fear, and anxiety that racialized communities often face when navigating the housing market in search of their first home in Canada. Particular emphasis is placed on the experiences of the Black community in Ontario, which frequently encounters harmful stereotypes from landlords.

The author proposes the adoption of culturally sensitive housing design as a means to address the barriers newcomers face in the housing market. This concept goes beyond interior decoration or murals; it involves architectural and spatial design that takes into account the cultural needs of residents, including the layout of public and communal spaces.

Taylor, M. (2017, August 30). Cultural Sensitivity: Accommodating Racialized & Newcomer Communities. Research Matters Blog. <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2017/cultural-sensitivity-accommodating-racialized-newcomer-communities/>

(Homelessness among asylum seekers; homelessness risk factors)

In this blog article, Taylor explores the intersection of homelessness, discrimination, historical trauma, and colonization. Focusing particularly on the experiences of refugees, the author identifies several barriers to accessing adequate housing. These include psychological distress, unemployment, limited social capital, language barriers, lack of access to transportation, and the absence of a credit history. The cumulative impact of these risk factors contributes to a concerning statistic: 10.1% of newcomer youth in Canada experience homelessness.

Taylor also challenges the widespread misconception that refugees are given priority access to affordable housing. In reality, settlement agencies working with refugee populations often turn to the private rental market to secure housing. This frequently results in arrangements that are unaffordable, overcrowded, or even illegally rented, further exacerbating the vulnerability of this group.

Oudshoorn, A. (2019, January 29). Whose Responsibility is Hidden Homelessness? Research Matters Blog. <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2019/whose-responsibility-hidden-homelessness/>

(Hidden homelessness; social support as a drain)

In this blog article, Oudshoorn explores the lived experiences of women facing hidden homelessness. The author emphasizes that women are particularly vulnerable to this form of housing insecurity, often relying on informal arrangements such as couch surfing to avoid absolute homelessness. A key concept introduced in the article is “support as a drain,” which refers to the systemic abuse and exploitation women may endure when depending on social networks for temporary shelter. Rather than offering safety, these arrangements can expose women to cycles of control, coercion, and emotional or physical harm.

Oudshoorn advocates for the establishment of a formal support system tailored to the needs of women experiencing hidden homelessness. Such a system is presented not only as a protective measure but also as a preventive strategy to reduce the risk of chronic homelessness among this population.

Ali, N. (2018, August 1). Understanding Hidden Homelessness. Research Matters Blog. <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2018/understanding-hidden-homelessness/>

(Hidden homelessness in Canada; homeless enumerating methodologies)

In this blog article, Ali explores the nature and definition of hidden homelessness, along with its associated risk factors. However, the article's most significant contribution lies in its reflection on the methodological challenges involved in identifying and understanding this phenomenon. The author points out that point-in-time (PiT) counts—commonly used to estimate homelessness—fail to capture individuals experiencing hidden homelessness on a given night. As a result, these counts often lead to a significant underestimation of the true scale of homelessness in Canada.

Drawing on innovative methodologies introduced in recent PiT counts, the author estimates that hidden homelessness may account for at least 80% of the total homeless population. This suggests that for every person identified through traditional enumeration methods, there may be four additional individuals living in hidden homelessness.

Gaetz, S.; Barr, C.; Friesen, A.; Harris, B.; Hill, C.; Kovacs-Burns, K.; Pauly, B.; Pearce, B.; Turner, A.; Marsolais, A. (2012) Canadian Definition of Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COH-Canadian%20Definition%20of%20Homelessness.pdf>

(Homelessness prevention)

In this publication, Gaetz et al. provide a foundational definition and typology of homelessness within the Canadian context. According to the authors, "*Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it.*" This definition underscores both the absence of adequate housing and the lack of immediate means to secure it. The authors also explore the complex interplay of structural and personal factors that contribute to homelessness, including poverty, systemic inequality, trauma, and health challenges.

To better understand and respond to the diverse realities of homelessness, the authors propose a four-level typology based on the degree of housing instability and access to services. The categories include: (1) **unsheltered**, referring to individuals living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; (2) **emergency sheltered**, encompassing those staying in overnight shelters or domestic violence shelters; (3) **provisionally accommodated**, which includes individuals in temporary or transitional housing arrangements; and (4) **at risk of homelessness**, referring to people whose current housing situation is precarious or unsustainable.

Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Donaldson, J., & Ali, N. (2017). Leading the Way: Reimagining Federal Leadership on Preventing Homelessness. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. <https://homelesshub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Prevention Policy Brief-Sept14.pdf>

(Homelessness prevention; Federal Government public policy)

In this policy brief, Gaetz et al. propose a renewed and proactive role for the federal government in preventing homelessness across Canada. Written in the context of the renewal of the National Housing Strategy (NHS), the brief outlines a comprehensive prevention framework aimed at addressing homelessness before it occurs.

The proposed strategy is structured around a five-level taxonomy. The first level, **structural prevention**, involves changes to legislation and policy to address root causes such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of affordable housing. The second level, **systems prevention**, focuses on improving coordination across public systems—such as health care, child welfare, and justice—to ensure individuals receive the support they need before becoming homeless. The third level, **early intervention**, targets individuals and families at imminent risk, offering timely support to prevent housing loss. The fourth level, **eviction prevention**,

includes measures such as landlord-tenant mediation and rent assistance to help people remain housed. Finally, the fifth level involves **support for those with lived experience of homelessness**, ensuring they receive the necessary resources to maintain stable housing and avoid recurrence.

Gaetz, S. & Dej, E. (2017). A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. <https://homelesshub.ca/resource/new-direction-framework-homelessness-prevention/>

(Homelessness prevention)

Drawing on prevention models from public health, Gaetz and Dej developed a framework for homelessness prevention in Canada that is grounded in a human rights perspective. Central to this approach is the principle that no one should have to prove they are “ready” or “deserving” of housing—housing is a fundamental right, not a reward.

The framework adapts the three levels of prevention commonly used in public health. **Primary prevention** aims to stop homelessness before it begins by addressing root causes and reducing risk factors. **Secondary prevention** involves early intervention to prevent the worsening of housing instability once it has emerged. **Tertiary prevention** focuses on supporting individuals who have already experienced homelessness, helping them manage long-term challenges and avoid recurrence.

In addition, the framework is informed by a **socio-ecological model**, which views homelessness as the outcome of a complex interplay between three categories of factors: **structural factors** (such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, and discrimination), **systemic failures** (such as gaps in health care, child welfare, and justice systems), and **individual or relational factors** (such as trauma, mental health issues, or family breakdown).

Oudshoorn, A., & Van Berkum, A. (2024). Homelessness prevention. In P. Somerville & J. D. Hulchanski (Eds.), *Research handbook on homelessness* (pp. 431–439). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781800883413/book-part-9781800883413-44.xml>

(Homelessness prevention; homelessness risk factors)

In their book chapter, Oudshoorn and Berkum contribute to the theoretical understanding of homelessness prevention in Canada by organizing contributing factors, policies, and programs into three interrelated levels: structural, systemic, and individual.

At the macro level, structural factors refer to broad socio-economic conditions that shape the risk of homelessness. These include failures in the labour and housing markets, systemic disinvestment in public and social housing, poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

The meso level focuses on systemic failures within publicly funded institutions. The authors highlight how experiences of marginalization are embedded in systems such as health care, justice, and child welfare. Individuals are particularly vulnerable when transitioning out of these systems—for example, after incarceration, long-term psychiatric hospitalization, or aging out of foster care.

At the micro level, the focus shifts to interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics. Risk factors at this level include relationship breakdowns, evictions, and conflicts with cohabitants. The authors also critique the dominant narrative that tends to individualize homelessness, noting that people who experience it often internalize blame, overlooking the broader socio-economic structures that contribute to their situation.

Manzo, L. C., & Kleit, R. G. (2013). Refugees and public housing redevelopment. *Geography Research Forum*, 33, 100–121. <https://grf.bgu.ac.il/index.php/GRF/article/view/406>

(Refugees' integration into mainstream society)

In this academic paper, Manzo and Kleit examine the experiences of Cambodian, Vietnamese, Somali, and Eritrean refugees living in public housing in two U.S. metropolitan areas. Through focus group discussions, the authors explore how these communities navigate integration into mainstream American society. The study reveals that refugees often develop ambivalent relationships with institutional power. While they express gratitude toward government and humanitarian agencies for the support received, they also report feelings of distrust toward unfamiliar institutions such as utility companies and housing authorities.

The authors conclude that although social mixing has been a central objective in public housing redevelopment strategies in the United States, issues related to race, ethnicity, and cultural integration have largely been overlooked.

Gaetz, S. (2020). Making the prevention of homelessness a priority: The role of social innovation. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 79(2), 353–381. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajes.12328>

(Homelessness prevention; Federal Government public policy)

In this article, Gaetz traces the evolution of homelessness prevention policies in Canada by reviewing key policy documents and identifying three distinct stages in the country's response to homelessness. The first stage is characterized by the development of emergency response measures aimed at addressing the immediate crisis of homelessness. The second stage involves the implementation of community-based plans, notably incorporating the Housing First approach. The third and most recent stage marks the emergence of early intervention strategies designed to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

The author concludes that the effectiveness of these measures has been mixed. Emergency responses introduced in the initial stage not only failed to resolve the issue but may have inadvertently worsened it. Gaetz writes, "We have learned that this approach, while largely—but not entirely—well-meaning, was not producing positive results for people experiencing homelessness, and in fact contributed to the growth of chronic homelessness." In contrast, the Housing First model introduced in the second stage has shown greater success in addressing chronic homelessness by prioritizing immediate access to stable housing without preconditions.

Kaufman, D. F. (2021). Canadian homeless mobilities: Tracing the inter-regional movements of At Home/Chez Soi participants. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 65(3), 292-305. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/cag.12658>

(Inter-regional homeless mobility; homelessness risks factors)

The academic article by Kaufman explores the factors explaining homeless inter-regional mobility in Canada. The research employs longitudinal survey data from 612 people living in or moving between five Canadian cities over a period of ten years.

Data analysis enables the author to identify ten themes of homeless inter-regional mobility in Canada, including: interpersonal networks, the attributes of different places, labour markets and personal finances,

the use of movement for personal growth, health and social services, residential mobilities, legal and health institutions, substance abuse and dependence, personal security, and travel.

The author concludes that the structural and personal factors that explain homelessness are also the causal determinants of inter-regional mobility among those living in homelessness.

Khan, B. M., Waserman, J., & Patel, M. (2022). Perspectives of refugee youth experiencing homelessness: a qualitative study of factors impacting mental health and resilience. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 13, 917200.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychiatry/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2022.917200/full>

(Migratory status as homelessness risk factor; homelessness experience)

The academic article by Khan, Waserman, and Patel explores mental health and resilience among refugee youth experiencing homelessness. The article describes the youth's experience of living in shelters as traumatic and seeks to understand the factors that explain the development of resilience in terms of psychological well-being. To do so, the authors use individual semi-structured interviews.

On the one hand, data analysis revealed eight determinants of mental distress: the immigration process, housing insecurity, finances, education, employment, sense of safety, culture shock, and language. On the other hand, goal-directedness, independence or responsibility, and nurturing social connectedness with family, peers, and community were identified as factors contributing to resilience.

Nelson, G., Aubry, T., Estecahandy, P., Laval, C., O'Sullivan, E., Shinn, M., & Tsemberis, S. (2021). *How social science can influence homelessness policy: Experiences from Europe, Canada, and the United States – Part I: Problem and solutions*. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 15(1), 3–24. file:///Users/arturovalladares/Downloads/EJH_15-1_Web.pdf

(Homelessness policy)

The article by Nelson et al. focuses on the role that researchers have had in Canada, Europe and the United States in shaping policy towards homelessness. The authors trace how academic debates have been helpful in linking policy responses to conceptualizations of the problem of homelessness. For instance, if homelessness is considered to result from individual characteristics, then responses emphasize 'treatment first' so that the person is prepared and made 'ready' for housing. On the contrary, when homelessness is framed in terms of its structural determinants, policies tend to emphasize the provision of affordable housing and income supports.

Finally, the authors stress the importance of the researcher-evaluator role. In other words, researchers influence solutions by bringing evidence into decision-making.

Priesler, S. *The Vulnerability of Newcomers (Including Refugees) in the Canadian Housing Sector (Student Rep. No. 3)*. Community Housing Canada. Retrieved from: <https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/6b99a-eb6-9f6c-4caa-b998-b6416d09b63e>

(Homelessness among migrants; homelessness among asylum seekers)

The report by Priesler explores the vulnerabilities of newcomers to Canada through a review of secondary sources. The author identifies several barriers, including discrimination and bias, lack of access to housing near essential services, and, notably, accommodations that are unsuitable for large families.

Focusing on the case of Syrian refugees who arrived between November 2015 and July 2016, the author emphasizes the difficulties large newcomer families face when transitioning from temporary to permanent housing arrangements. It is noted that 10% of Syrian refugees came from families with eight or more members, meaning that many housing providers did not have suitable accommodations for them.

Brais, H., & Laniyonu, A. (2025). Shelter in place: Neighbourhood policing of homelessness in Montreal, Canada. *Urban Geography*, 46(3), 612-631.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02723638.2024.2377437>

(Inter-regional homeless mobility; Homelessness policy)

Through a qualitative study involving 29 officers, the academic article by Brais and Laniyonu examines the interaction between the Montreal Police Service and the local homeless population. In the introduction, the authors state that in many North American cities, the relationship between police and homeless individuals is often characterized by violent and discriminatory practices aimed at displacing unsheltered people from downtown areas. However, according to the authors, the Montreal Police Service follows a different approach, referred to as a maintaining policy, which views unsheltered individuals as residents of a neighbourhood.

The rationale behind this maintaining policy lies in the recognition of the negative effects that forced migration from one area of the city to another can have on homeless individuals. Furthermore, the policy aims to build alliances between the homeless, the police, and neighborhood-level resources.

Bachour, M. K. (2024). Can Canada become home without a house? The intersectional challenges to housing and settlement among refugees. *Housing Studies*, 39(10), 2504-2526.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2023.2200236>

(Stakeholders' coordination across sectors and levels; homelessness among asylum seekers)

The article by Bachour examines the barriers that refugees face when seeking housing upon arrival in the Toronto Metropolitan Area. By analyzing data from 13 semi-structured interviews with frontline workers from service provider organizations, the article aims to unpack the gaps between federal immigration policies and the reliance on local actors—such as non-profit and community organizations—to support refugee integration into the housing market.

The research findings indicate that the lack of affordable housing, low vacancy rates, family size, and discrimination in the housing market are major barriers preventing refugees from accessing adequate housing.

Kidd, S. A., Bezgrebelna, M., Hajat, S., Keevers, L., Ravindran, A., Stergiopoulos, V., ... & McKenzie, K. (2023). A response framework for addressing the risks of climate change for homeless populations. *Climate Policy*, 23(5), 623-636.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14693062.2023.2194280%4010.1080/tfocoll.2022.0.issue-Adaptation-Climate-Policy>

(Homelessness prevention; climate change and homelessness)

In this article, Kidd et al. seek to interrelate two areas of knowledge that are rarely studied together: climate change and homelessness. The authors draw on data generated through a year-long systematic review of knowledge produced by five think tanks.

They argue that prevention-oriented plans are more effective in terms of both outcomes and cost-efficiency compared to the more commonly implemented crisis response models. Furthermore, the article emphasizes that policy design aimed at addressing the health risks and inequities faced by the homeless population during a climate crisis must include stakeholder consultation, consider local input, be sensitive to cultural specificities, and demonstrate trauma-informed awareness.

Dej, E., Sanders, C., et al. (2025). The Invisibility Trap: The Paradoxical Effect of Making Homelessness Invisible. From NIMBY to Neighbour Research Team, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

(Homelessness visibility/invisibility; public policy; stigma and displacement)

This visual report analyzes how community responses in mid-sized Ontario cities often seek to render homelessness invisible, but end up intensifying public visibility, exclusion, and suffering among the unhoused. The authors identify “five paradoxes” arising from efforts to control, displace, or criminalize homelessness, and offer actionable, rights-based solutions relevant to cities like Montreal. It highlights how reluctance to address this form of homelessness impacts migrants and asylum seekers who face even greater barriers to stability and inclusion.

Smith, A. (2022). *Multiple barriers: The multilevel governance of homelessness in Canada*. University of Toronto Press.

(Homelessness policy)

In this book, Smith applies the concept of multi-level governance to the analysis of homelessness in four large urban centers in Canada. The author traces the evolution of the relationship between the federal and provincial governments, from being the primary providers of social protection and welfare to a new configuration in which the federal government transfers financial resources to the provinces without prescribing specific policies. In this new arrangement, multi-level governance is understood as an attempt to ensure that national government policies are formulated and implemented with enough flexibility to suit the diverse conditions of different communities.

However, when it comes to homelessness, the author describes a shared frustration stemming from the incompatibility of existing policies and programs. Finally, in her view, when actors agree on the nature of the problem, they are more likely to coordinate and cooperate.

Taylor, A. (2011). *Social media as a tool for inclusion*. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Taylor_Social%20Media_feb2011%20%281%29_1_2.pdf

(Homelessness, ICTs and social media)

By analyzing data from case studies of three different NGOs, the report by Taylor examines the benefits of using social media among five vulnerable populations in Canada, one of which includes recent immigrants and refugees.

The report finds that many immigrants have limited knowledge of computers, the internet, and social media, and often possess little proficiency in either French or English. As a result, agencies and organizations responsible for supporting the settlement process tend to rely on face-to-face meetings. The report also emphasizes the importance of providing newcomers with computer training, preferably in their native language. Despite the barriers mentioned, the report notes that social media and other digital platforms have the potential to make settlement support programs more cost-effective.

Kaplan, I. (2018, October 26). *How smartphones and social media have revolutionized refugee migration*. UNHCR Blog. <https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/smartphones-revolutionized-refugee-migration/>

(ICTs and social media)

This blog article explores the importance of ICTs and social media in migratory processes. Drawing on interviews with researchers and stakeholders, the author identifies five primary ways in which migrants use social media: communication, translation, information, navigation, and representation. Regarding communication, the author highlights the crucial role that social media and smartphones play in helping refugees stay in touch with their families, as well as in connecting with underground networks that facilitate the migratory journey.

Emphasizing the significance of trust for migrants in transit, the author notes that smartphones and social media help verify accurate information and counteract the spread of rumors. Finally, the article mentions the presence of official agencies from European governments that aim to combat misinformation.

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2023). *Homelessness data snapshot: Analysis of chronic homelessness among shelter users in Canada (2017–2021)*. Government of Canada. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/chronic-homelessness-2017-2021-litinerance-chronique-eng.html>

(Chronic and cyclical homelessness; statistics about homelessness across Canada)

In this report, the Canadian Federal Government establishes criteria to define chronic homelessness. The phenomenon is defined as the experience of homelessness that occurs in sheltered and unsheltered areas, as well as experiences of hidden homelessness.

According to the study, the temporality of shelter use is the most significant indicator of chronic homelessness, which is measured as the number of individuals having a total of at least six months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year, or having recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past three years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days).

According to the study, out of the 93,529 people who experienced homelessness at an emergency shelter in Canada in 2021, 28,631 fell into the definition of chronic homelessness. At the same time, the report notes that between 2017 and 2021, chronic homelessness among shelter users increased by 22.4%.

The report relies on administrative data collected from communities that have complete coverage of their permanent emergency shelter systems over a three-year period.

Kaufman, D. (2020). Canadian homeless mobilities: Tracing the inter-regional movements of At Home/Chez Soi participants. *Canadian Geographies - Géographies canadiennes*. 65 (3). 292-305. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/caq.12658>

(Inter-regional homeless mobility)

In this academic article, Kaufman explores the spatial mobility of the homeless within Canadian cities. The author employs survey data from 612 homeless individuals, examining their mobility history over a period of ten years.

The author's analysis identifies ten themes behind homeless mobility: interpersonal networks, the attributes of different places, labour markets and personal finances, the use of movement for personal growth, health and social services, residential mobilities, legal and health institutions, substance abuse and dependence, personal security, and travel.

Finally, the author states that the reasons explaining homeless mobility are often related to the reasons that produced the phenomenon itself. Thus, they may offer another tool to better understand homelessness.

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191.

<https://heinonline.org/HOL/PrintRequest?handle=hein.journals/jrefst21&collection=journals&div=15&id=170&print=section&action=15>

Immigrant participation in the community; links between migratory status and access to services

In this influential article, Ager and Strang propose a conceptual framework to understand the process of integration among refugees and migrants. Drawing on an extensive review of the literature and consultations with policymakers and practitioners in the United Kingdom, the authors identify key domains that structure integration processes. These domains include employment, housing, education, and health as foundational markers of integration, as well as social connections, language acquisition, safety, and rights and citizenship.

The framework highlights the importance of both structural and relational dimensions of integration. Structural factors refer to access to essential resources and services, while relational factors concern social bonds within communities, bridges between different groups, and links to institutions and the state. The authors argue that successful integration depends not only on economic participation but also on the ability of migrants to build meaningful social networks and develop a sense of belonging within the host society.

Architecture sans frontières Québec (ASFQ). (2025). *Itinérance et aménagement de l'espace public : étude de cas du secteur de Saint-Roch à Québec*. Québec, QC: Architecture sans frontières Québec.

Homeless realities; stakeholders' coordination across sectors and levels

This report by Architecture sans frontières Québec examines the relationship between homelessness and the design and management of public space through a case study of the Saint-Roch district in Québec City. Drawing on field observations, spatial analysis, and consultations with local stakeholders, the study explores how urban design, public space regulation, and municipal policies influence the daily experiences of people living in homelessness. The report highlights how public spaces function as essential living environments

for people experiencing homelessness, particularly in dense urban areas. It examines the tensions that arise between the needs of homeless individuals to use public spaces for rest, socialization, and survival, and the regulatory or design strategies implemented by municipalities to control or limit these uses.

A key contribution of the study is its focus on the role of urban planning and architectural practices in shaping the spatial conditions of homelessness. The authors argue that urban interventions—such as defensive architecture, surveillance, or restrictive bylaws—can unintentionally exacerbate exclusion. Conversely, more inclusive planning approaches that consider the needs of vulnerable populations can contribute to more equitable and humane urban environments. The report also emphasizes the importance of coordination between municipalities, community organizations, and design professionals in addressing homelessness in public space. By highlighting the spatial dimension of homelessness, the study provides valuable insights for urban planners, architects, and policymakers seeking to design public spaces that balance accessibility, safety, and social inclusion.

Architecture sans frontières Québec (ASFQ), Grimard, C., Wagner, S., Prince, E., Blanck, S., Lapalme, V., & Levasseur, É. (2023). *Architecture + Itinérance : pratiques inclusives pour une ville solidaire*. Québec, QC: Architecture sans frontières Québec.

Homeless realities; stakeholders' coordination across sectors and levels

This report produced by Architecture sans frontières Québec examines the relationship between homelessness and the design of the built environment, with a particular focus on how architectural and urban planning practices can contribute to more inclusive cities. Based on field observations, consultations with community organizations, and interdisciplinary reflection among practitioners and researchers, the report proposes a series of principles and practical guidelines aimed at integrating the realities of homelessness into urban design processes. The authors argue that homelessness is not only a social issue but also a spatial one, closely connected to the organization and regulation of public space. Architectural design, urban infrastructure, and planning regulations shape the daily experiences of people living in homelessness by determining how public spaces can be used, accessed, or restricted. The report highlights how certain urban design strategies—such as defensive architecture or restrictive spatial regulations—may reinforce the exclusion of vulnerable populations from the city.

In response, the study proposes a set of inclusive design practices intended to foster more equitable urban environments. These practices emphasize collaboration between architects, urban planners, municipal authorities, and community organizations working with people experiencing homelessness. The report stresses the importance of recognizing the knowledge and experiences of individuals living in homelessness in the design and planning of urban spaces. By framing homelessness as a spatial and design challenge, the report contributes to expanding the discussion beyond social policy toward the role of architecture and urban planning in shaping more inclusive cities. Its recommendations provide practical guidance for professionals and institutions seeking to integrate social inclusion into the design and management of public space.

Aubry, T., Farrell, S., Hwang, S. W., & Calhoun, M. (2013). Identifying the patterns of emergency shelter stays of single individuals in Canadian cities of different sizes. *Housing Studies*, 28(6), 910–927.

Shelter systems; trajectories and patterns of homelessness

This study analyzes patterns of emergency shelter use among single homeless individuals across Canadian cities of different sizes. Using administrative shelter data, the authors identify distinct trajectories of shelter use and categorize homeless individuals into three main groups: transitional users, episodic users, and

chronic users. Transitional users represent the majority of shelter residents and typically experience short-term shelter stays associated with temporary crises. Episodic users cycle in and out of shelters over time, while chronic users experience long and continuous periods of homelessness. The analysis demonstrates that a relatively small proportion of shelter users account for a disproportionate share of total shelter stays, particularly among the chronic and episodic groups. These findings highlight the heterogeneity of homelessness experiences and suggest that different intervention strategies are required depending on the trajectory of shelter use.

The study also compares shelter use patterns across cities of varying sizes and finds that, despite differences in local housing markets and service systems, the overall distribution of shelter trajectories remains broadly consistent. This suggests that structural and individual factors driving homelessness operate similarly across urban contexts. By identifying distinct trajectories of shelter use, the article provides an important empirical basis for policy approaches such as Housing First, which prioritize long-term housing solutions for chronically homeless individuals. The typology developed in this study has become influential in homelessness research and offers a useful analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of shelter use within broader housing instability trajectories.

Barman-Adhikari, A., Rice, E., Onasch-Vera, L., & Hemler, M. (Eds.). (2018). *The Digital Lives of Youth Who are Homeless: Implications for Intervention, Policy, and Services*. Ottawa: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Digital connectivity; access to services and social networks

This edited volume examines how information and communication technologies (ICT)—including social media, mobile phones, and online platforms—shape the everyday lives of youth experiencing homelessness. Drawing on empirical studies conducted primarily in the United States, the book challenges the common assumption that homeless youth are disconnected from digital technologies. Instead, research presented in the volume shows that a large proportion of these youth actively use the internet, social networking sites, and mobile devices to maintain relationships, access information, and navigate survival strategies. The book highlights the multiple functions digital technologies serve for homeless youth. These tools enable them to maintain connections with family members, home-based peers, and service providers, thereby extending their social networks beyond street environments. ICT is also used instrumentally to search for housing opportunities, employment, and health information, while providing access to essential services through online communication and mobile applications.

At the same time, the volume discusses potential risks associated with digital engagement. Online platforms may expose homeless youth to harmful situations, including exploitation or risky behaviours such as survival sex. These findings highlight the complex role of digital environments as both protective resources and potential sources of vulnerability. The book ultimately argues that ICT can play a significant role in improving outreach and service delivery for homeless youth. It reviews emerging interventions—including online prevention programs, smartphone applications connecting youth to services, and electronic case management systems—that leverage digital communication tools to engage this highly mobile and hard-to-reach population. While evidence remains preliminary, the studies suggest that technology-based interventions can expand access to services and strengthen connections between youth and support systems.

Boucher, G. (2025). *Portrait et évolution des classes moyennes au Québec et au Canada*. Montréal, QC: Observatoire québécois des inégalités.

Socioeconomic stratification; income distribution and social change

This report provides a comprehensive statistical portrait of the middle classes in Québec and Canada and examines their evolution over the past several decades. Drawing on multiple datasets from Statistics Canada—including the Survey of Consumer Finances, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, the Canadian Income Survey, and the Survey of Financial Security—the study analyzes long-term trends in income distribution, socioeconomic characteristics, and the relative size of social classes. The report defines the middle class as households whose after-tax income falls between 75% and 200% of the median adjusted household income, a definition widely used in international comparative research. This income-based approach allows the author to track the evolution of the middle class over time and compare its characteristics across different regions and demographic groups. The analysis shows that the size of the middle class in Québec has slightly increased over the past several decades. Between 1976 and 2022, the proportion of the population considered middle class grew, while both the disadvantaged and affluent groups slightly declined. This trend contrasts somewhat with other international contexts where middle classes have tended to shrink.

Beyond income distribution, the report examines the demographic and socioeconomic composition of the middle class, including household structure, employment patterns, education levels, immigration status, regional location, and housing tenure. The findings highlight how structural factors such as government transfers, taxation, labour market participation, and housing conditions shape the economic position of middle-income households. Overall, the report provides an important empirical reference for understanding social stratification in Québec and Canada. By documenting the evolution and characteristics of the middle class over nearly five decades, it contributes to debates on inequality, social mobility, and the changing economic foundations of middle-income households.

Buccieri, K., Davy, J., Gilmer, C., & Whitmore, N. (2022). *Understanding Homelessness in Canada*. ON: Pressbooks.

Conceptual foundations; structural and individual drivers of homelessness

This open-access textbook provides a comprehensive overview of homelessness in the Canadian context, synthesizing research from sociology, social policy, public health, and urban studies. The book examines how homelessness emerges from the interaction of structural factors—such as housing market dynamics, poverty, and social policy—with individual and relational circumstances including health challenges, trauma, family conflict, and social exclusion. A central contribution of the book is its emphasis on the **structural nature of homelessness**. The authors argue that homelessness should not be understood primarily as an individual failure but as the outcome of broader systemic conditions, particularly the shortage of affordable housing and the erosion of social safety nets. The text also highlights how different populations experience homelessness in distinct ways, including youth, Indigenous peoples, women fleeing violence, migrants, and people with mental health or substance use challenges.

The book further reviews key conceptual frameworks used in Canadian homelessness research, including definitions of homelessness, typologies of housing instability, and policy approaches such as Housing First. It also discusses the role of emergency shelters, transitional housing, and community-based services within the broader housing support system. By combining theoretical discussion with empirical evidence and case examples, the volume serves as both an introduction to homelessness research and a reference for practitioners and policymakers. Its interdisciplinary perspective helps situate homelessness within broader debates on housing policy, social inequality, and urban governance in Canada.

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2026). *The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. Available at: <https://preventhomelessness.ca>

By fostering collaboration between academic institutions, governments, and community organizations, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness plays a central role in shaping contemporary debates on homelessness prevention and policy development in Canada. Hosted at York University, the Observatory brings together researchers, policymakers, service providers, and community organizations to promote evidence-based approaches to homelessness prevention and housing stability. The COH website functions as a central platform for disseminating research, policy reports, toolkits, and educational resources related to homelessness. A key focus of the Observatory is the promotion of homelessness prevention frameworks, emphasizing upstream interventions that address the structural drivers of homelessness—such as housing affordability, income insecurity, and gaps in social services—before individuals enter homelessness.

In addition to research dissemination, the Observatory supports collaborative initiatives including national research partnerships, training programs, and knowledge translation activities aimed at improving policy design and service delivery. The platform also hosts widely used resources such as the Homeless Hub, which provides open access to research publications, data, and best practices related to homelessness. By fostering collaboration between academic institutions, governments, and community organizations, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness plays a central role in shaping contemporary debates on homelessness prevention and policy development in Canada.

Castel, R. (1995). *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale : Une chronique du salariat*. Paris: Fayard.

Social exclusion; labour market transformations and vulnerability

In this seminal work, Robert Castel examines the historical transformation of what he calls the “social question” in Western societies, focusing on the changing role of wage labour in structuring social integration. Through a long-term historical analysis, Castel traces the evolution from pre-industrial forms of marginality to the emergence of the modern wage-based society and the development of welfare-state institutions designed to stabilize social relations. Castel argues that stable wage employment historically served as the principal mechanism of social integration, providing individuals with income, rights, and social protection. However, the restructuring of labour markets since the late twentieth century—characterized by unemployment, precarious employment, and weakening social protections—has generated new forms of social vulnerability. These transformations have produced what Castel describes as a “zone of vulnerability”, situated between full social integration through stable employment and complete exclusion from the labour market.

A key contribution of the book is its conceptualization of social stratification as a continuum structured by three main zones: integration, vulnerability, and disaffiliation. Individuals in the zone of disaffiliation experience a breakdown of both employment ties and social support networks, placing them at heightened risk of marginalization and homelessness. Although Castel’s work is not specifically about homelessness, it has been highly influential in research on poverty, exclusion, and housing instability. His framework helps situate homelessness within broader structural transformations of labour markets and welfare systems, highlighting how precarious employment and weakened social protections can push individuals toward social disaffiliation and housing insecurity.

Clapham, D. (2003). Pathways approaches to homelessness research. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 13(2), 119–127.

Housing pathways; trajectories of homelessness; structure–agency interaction

Clapham proposes the “pathways” approach as a framework for homelessness research that bridges the traditional divide between structural explanations (housing markets, labour conditions, welfare systems) and individual-level factors. The concept of a housing pathway conceptualizes homelessness as a dynamic episode within broader life trajectories, shaped by transitions in family relations, employment, and institutional encounters. Drawing on social constructionism and structuration theory, the article emphasizes how interactions between homeless individuals, service providers, and policy frameworks shape housing trajectories. The pathways perspective highlights the importance of longitudinal and biographical research methods to understand how homelessness develops, persists, and is potentially resolved over time.

CMHC. (2024). *Housing Market Information: Montréal CMA*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Housing market conditions; affordability pressures; structural drivers of housing instability

This report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) provides an overview of housing market conditions in the Montréal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Drawing on housing market data, the report analyzes trends in rental markets, housing supply, vacancy rates, and housing affordability. It highlights the tightening of Montréal’s housing market in recent years, characterized by declining vacancy rates and rising rents, reflecting increased demand and limited housing supply. The report examines variations across neighbourhoods and housing segments, identifying significant pressures in the rental market, particularly for lower-cost units. These conditions have intensified affordability challenges for low-income households, newcomers, and other vulnerable populations who depend on the rental sector.

CMHC also discusses broader structural factors shaping the housing market, including demographic growth, immigration, housing construction trends, and changing household formation patterns. The report suggests that the mismatch between housing supply and demand—particularly in affordable rental housing—has contributed to increased housing precarity. Overall, the report provides key statistical evidence for understanding the structural housing context in Montréal. Its findings help situate homelessness and housing instability within broader housing market dynamics, particularly the shortage of affordable rental housing and rising housing costs affecting vulnerable populations.

de la Calzada-Calugay, R., & Hanley, J. (2024). *Homelessness and housing insecurity among im/migrants in Canada: A scoping review*. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 33(1), 43–59.

Migrant homelessness; structural barriers; housing precarity

This article presents a scoping review of the emerging literature on homelessness and housing insecurity among immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Canada. The authors synthesize findings from academic and grey literature to identify key patterns, drivers, and gaps in research on migrant homelessness. The review highlights how migrants face distinct structural barriers that increase vulnerability to housing instability, including precarious legal status, labour market discrimination, limited access to social services, and difficulties navigating housing systems. The article emphasizes that migrant homelessness often remains hidden or undercounted, as many migrants rely on informal arrangements such as overcrowded housing, temporary stays with acquaintances, or unstable short-term rentals rather than emergency shelters. As a result, conventional homelessness data—particularly shelter-based statistics—may underestimate the scale of housing insecurity among migrant populations.

The review also identifies important institutional and policy barriers, including eligibility restrictions for social housing, income support programs, and settlement services. These limitations can push newcomers into precarious housing trajectories, particularly during the early stages of settlement. Overall, the article contributes to the growing recognition of migrant homelessness as a distinct but understudied phenomenon in Canada. By synthesizing existing research, it highlights the need for improved data collection, targeted policy responses, and greater attention to the specific housing challenges faced by immigrant and refugee populations.

Dionne, M.-A., Laporte, C., Loepky, J., & Miller, A. (2023). *A review of Canadian homelessness data 2023*. Income Research Paper Series. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Homelessness measurement; national data sources; methodological challenges

This report by Statistics Canada reviews the main data sources currently used to measure homelessness in Canada and evaluates their strengths and limitations. The authors examine multiple datasets—including Point-in-Time (PiT) counts, shelter administrative data, survey-based estimates, and census-related indicators—to provide a comprehensive overview of how homelessness is quantified at the national level. The report highlights that no single data source captures the full scope of homelessness. Shelter data provide detailed information about individuals using emergency shelters but exclude those experiencing unsheltered or hidden homelessness. PiT counts offer snapshots of homelessness in communities but are limited by methodological differences across municipalities and their inability to capture temporal dynamics.

The authors also discuss the growing importance of integrating administrative and survey data to better understand the scale and characteristics of homelessness across Canada. Particular attention is given to the challenges of measuring hidden homelessness, as well as the difficulties of capturing the experiences of populations that are underrepresented in existing datasets, including migrants, youth, and Indigenous peoples. Overall, the report provides a critical overview of the Canadian homelessness data ecosystem and identifies areas where improved data integration and methodological innovation are needed. Its analysis is particularly relevant for researchers and policymakers seeking to interpret homelessness statistics and design evidence-based housing and social policy interventions.

Djogbenou, R., Adjiwanou, V., & Lardoux, S. (2025). *The effect of national origin and gender on the cultural participation of immigrants in Quebec*. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 1–25.

Immigrant integration; cultural participation; social inclusion

This article examines how national origin and gender influence the cultural participation of immigrants in Québec. Using quantitative data from population surveys, the authors analyze patterns of participation in cultural, recreational, and leisure activities among immigrant populations and compare them with those of the native-born population. The study highlights significant differences in participation rates depending on immigrants' region of origin, length of residence in Québec, and gender. The findings show that cultural participation plays an important role in processes of social integration by facilitating social interactions, expanding networks, and strengthening a sense of belonging within host societies. However, participation levels vary considerably across immigrant groups, reflecting structural barriers such as economic constraints, language challenges, and differential access to cultural institutions.

Gender differences are also evident, with immigrant women often facing additional constraints related to family responsibilities, labour market participation, and cultural norms. These factors can limit opportunities for engagement in leisure and cultural activities compared to both immigrant men and non-immigrant populations. Overall, the article highlights how cultural participation functions as an important dimension of social inclusion and integration. By examining the intersection of national origin and gender, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how immigrants engage with social and cultural life in Québec and the structural conditions that shape these patterns.

Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S., & Watts, B. (2017). *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2017*. London: Crisis UK and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Homelessness trends; policy analysis; structural drivers

This report is part of the *Homelessness Monitor* series, an annual independent study that examines trends in homelessness in England and assesses the impact of economic conditions and public policies on housing insecurity. Drawing on a combination of statistical analysis, policy review, and interviews with key stakeholders across local authorities and service providers, the report provides a comprehensive overview of changes in homelessness levels and service pressures. The analysis highlights a significant increase in homelessness indicators in England in the years preceding the report, including rising rough sleeping, increased use of temporary accommodation, and growing demand for homelessness services. The authors link these trends to broader structural factors such as housing affordability pressures, welfare reform measures, and reductions in social housing supply.

The report also examines the functioning of the homelessness assistance system in England, including local authority responsibilities, prevention strategies, and the role of emergency and temporary accommodation. Particular attention is given to the policy environment, showing how welfare policies, housing market conditions, and local government resources interact to shape homelessness outcomes. Overall, the *Homelessness Monitor* provides an important evidence base for understanding the structural and policy drivers of homelessness. Its longitudinal approach allows researchers and policymakers to track how shifts in economic conditions and housing policies influence homelessness trends over time.

Forchuk, C., Russell, G., Richardson, J., Perreault, C., Hassan, H., Lucyk, B., & Gyamfi, S. (2022). Family Matters in Ontario: Understanding and Addressing Homelessness Among Newcomer Families in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 54(1), 27–39.

Newcomer family homelessness; settlement barriers; housing pathways

This qualitative study examines the factors contributing to homelessness among newcomer families in Ontario and identifies strategies to prevent and reduce housing instability. Based on a focused ethnographic approach embedded in participatory action research, the study analyzes the experiences of immigrant families staying in a family shelter and explores the social and structural challenges they face during the settlement process. The findings identify several pathways leading to family homelessness, including socioeconomic hardships, limited knowledge of the Canadian social and housing systems, barriers to employment, discrimination, and insufficient financial resources. Participants reported difficulties navigating housing markets, accessing affordable housing, and understanding institutional procedures and tenancy regulations. These factors often resulted in unstable housing trajectories and repeated mobility between cities, shelters, and temporary accommodation.

The study also highlights structural barriers such as inadequate social assistance, restrictive shelter policies, landlord discrimination, and challenges related to credential recognition and labour market integration. In addition, the absence of social support networks and cultural misunderstandings between newcomers and service providers further complicated settlement and housing stability. Participants proposed several solutions to mitigate newcomer family homelessness, including longer shelter stays, increased availability of affordable housing, improved social assistance levels, faster settlement and employment processes, and more culturally sensitive services. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of structural and policy interventions that support early integration and housing stability for immigrant families, highlighting the need for coordinated social services and inclusive housing policies.

Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Friesen, A., Harris, B., Hill, C., Kovacs-Burns, K., Pauly, B., Pearce, B., Turner, A., & Marsolais, A. (2012). *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Conceptual definition; typology of homelessness; housing precarity

This report establishes the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, a widely used conceptual framework that defines homelessness as the situation of individuals or families lacking stable, permanent, and appropriate housing, as well as the means to acquire it. The definition emphasizes that homelessness results from a combination of structural barriers, lack of affordable housing, discrimination, and individual or household challenges. A key contribution of the report is the development of a four-part typology of homelessness: (1) unsheltered homelessness, referring to people living in public spaces or places not intended for habitation; (2) emergency sheltered, including individuals staying in shelters; (3) provisionally accommodated, referring to those in temporary or insecure arrangements such as couch surfing, transitional housing, or temporary institutional accommodation; and (4) people at risk of homelessness, whose housing situation is precarious due to economic, social, or housing-related vulnerabilities. The framework highlights that homelessness is not a static condition but rather a fluid experience along a continuum of housing instability, with individuals often moving between different forms of precarious housing over time. By expanding the concept beyond visible street homelessness to include hidden and at-risk populations, the report provides an important analytical tool for research, policy development, and service planning related to homelessness in Canada.

Gaetz, S., Donaldson, J., Richter, T., & Gulliver, T. (2013). *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

National overview; homelessness measurement; policy responses

This report provides the first comprehensive national overview of homelessness in Canada, synthesizing available research and statistical data to assess the scale, characteristics, and causes of homelessness. It aims to establish a baseline for understanding homelessness and to support the development of evidence-based strategies to address it. The report estimates that at least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year, while approximately 30,000 people are homeless on any given night, including individuals who are unsheltered, staying in emergency shelters, or living in temporary institutional accommodation. It also highlights the presence of significant hidden homelessness, referring to individuals temporarily staying with friends or relatives due to lack of stable housing.

The authors emphasize that homelessness results from the interaction of structural factors—such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, and labour market changes—alongside systems failures and individual crises. The report also identifies key sub-populations disproportionately affected by homelessness, including youth, Indigenous peoples, women, and families. Finally, the report underscores the economic and social costs of homelessness and advocates for policy approaches focused on prevention, increased affordable housing supply, improved data collection, and the adoption of Housing First strategies to support long-term housing stability.

Gaetz, S., Gulliver, T., & Richter, T. (2016). *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

National trends; homelessness measurement; housing policy

This report provides an updated national assessment of homelessness in Canada, building on earlier analyses by synthesizing recent research, emergency shelter data, and policy developments. It examines structural drivers of homelessness, emerging trends within the homeless population, and policy responses aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across the country. Drawing on the National Shelter Study (2005–2014), the report highlights key patterns in the use of emergency shelters. Approximately 136,865 individuals used emergency shelters in 2014, representing a decline compared to earlier years, though the data do not fully capture people who remain unsheltered or those experiencing hidden homelessness. The

report also shows that most shelter stays are short-term, while a smaller group of chronically or episodically homeless individuals accounts for a disproportionate share of shelter use.

The analysis emphasizes that homelessness in Canada is shaped by structural factors such as housing affordability, poverty, and systemic failures in social services. Particular attention is given to priority populations, including youth, Indigenous peoples, and veterans, who experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates and require targeted policy interventions. The report concludes by advocating for a comprehensive National Housing Strategy centred on prevention, increased investment in affordable housing, and the expansion of Housing First approaches. It argues that ending homelessness in Canada is achievable but requires coordinated action across federal, provincial, and local governments, supported by long-term funding and improved data systems.

Gouvernement du Canada. (2018). *Rapport final du Comité consultatif sur l'itinérance*. Ottawa: Emploi et Développement social Canada.

National homelessness strategy; policy framework; prevention and housing systems

This report presents the final recommendations of Canada's Advisory Committee on Homelessness, established to guide the development of a renewed federal strategy to address homelessness. The report informed the creation of Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, which aims to support communities in preventing and reducing homelessness through coordinated federal investments and policy reforms. The committee emphasizes that homelessness in Canada is driven primarily by structural factors, including the shortage of affordable housing, poverty, and systemic barriers affecting vulnerable populations. The report calls for a comprehensive systems-based approach that integrates housing policy, social services, and prevention strategies across different levels of government and community organizations.

A key recommendation is the adoption of Housing First principles, prioritizing immediate access to permanent housing combined with appropriate support services. The report also highlights the importance of improving data collection, strengthening community-level coordination, and addressing the needs of disproportionately affected populations such as Indigenous peoples, youth, women fleeing violence, and people leaving institutions. Overall, the report provides a policy roadmap for transforming Canada's approach to homelessness from emergency responses toward prevention, housing stability, and long-term system coordination.

Gouvernement du Québec. (2024). *Montreal's 2022 Point-in-Time Count of People Experiencing Homelessness: General Overview*. Québec: Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux.

Homelessness measurement; local trends; demographic characteristics

This report presents the general results of the 2022 Point-in-Time (PiT) count of visible homelessness in Montréal, conducted on the night of October 11, 2022. The exercise aimed to estimate the number of individuals experiencing visible homelessness and to document their demographic characteristics, living situations, and key social and health conditions. The count estimates that 4,690 people were experiencing visible homelessness in Montréal, representing a 33% increase compared to the 2018 count, although methodological differences between exercises must be considered when interpreting this change. Approximately 17% of individuals were unsheltered, spending the night outdoors in places such as streets, parks, vehicles, or encampments, while 83% were staying in temporary accommodation, including emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other institutional settings.

The report also provides a demographic profile of the population experiencing homelessness. Most individuals identified as men (66%), though the proportion of women increased compared to previous counts. Indigenous people were significantly overrepresented, accounting for about 13% of respondents, while approximately 20% reported a migration trajectory, including immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. Additional findings highlight the prevalence of health and social vulnerabilities. Among respondents, 59% reported mental health issues, 54% reported substance use problems, and 45% reported chronic physical health conditions. The most frequently cited reasons for the loss of housing included eviction, insufficient income, substance use problems, and interpersonal conflict. Overall, the report provides a key empirical reference for understanding the scale and characteristics of visible homelessness in Montréal. It also highlights the methodological limitations of point-in-time counts, noting that such exercises underestimate the true extent of homelessness because they do not fully capture hidden or episodic homelessness.

Grimard, C. (2022). Au croisement de la sociologie et de l'architecture. Itérations multidisciplinaires pour étudier l'itinérance. *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, (72), 87–103.

Spatial dimensions of homelessness; interdisciplinary approaches; urban design

In this article, Grimard explores the intersection between sociology and architecture in the study of homelessness, arguing for the importance of multidisciplinary approaches to understand how homelessness is shaped by spatial and urban conditions. The paper examines how built environments—such as public spaces, shelters, and transitional housing—structure the everyday experiences of people living in homelessness and influence their interactions with institutions and the broader city. The author emphasizes that homelessness should not be understood solely as a social or economic phenomenon but also as a spatial condition, deeply connected to the organization, regulation, and design of urban environments. Architectural and urban planning decisions—such as the configuration of public spaces, accessibility of services, and location of shelters—play a critical role in shaping both the visibility and the management of homelessness.

The article advocates for iterative collaboration between researchers, architects, urban planners, and community organizations, highlighting how interdisciplinary research can generate new insights into the spatial dynamics of homelessness and inform more inclusive urban design practices. By bridging sociological analysis and architectural thinking, the study contributes to expanding the conceptual and methodological tools used to analyze homelessness in urban contexts.

Grimard, C., Lapalme, V., Wagner-Lapierre, S., & Blanck, S. (2024). Le Bien-Être des Personnes en Situation d'Itinérance: Le Partage de l'Espace Examiné Sous les Loupes de l'Architecture et du Travail Social. *International Journal on Homelessness*, 4(1), 202–229.

Public space; spatial justice; interdisciplinary perspectives

This article examines how the sharing and regulation of public space affects the well-being of people experiencing homelessness, drawing on perspectives from both architecture and social work. Through an interdisciplinary framework, the authors analyze how urban design, spatial regulations, and social services shape the everyday experiences of individuals living in homelessness and influence their ability to access, inhabit, and move through urban environments. The study highlights the tensions that arise in public spaces where different users—residents, businesses, municipal authorities, and people experiencing homelessness—compete for access and legitimacy. Urban policies and design strategies often seek to regulate or limit the presence of homeless individuals in public spaces, which can contribute to processes of exclusion and spatial marginalization.

At the same time, the article argues that architectural and urban design approaches can play an important role in promoting more inclusive environments. By examining the interaction between spatial design and social intervention, the authors advocate for greater collaboration between urban designers, social workers, and community organizations to improve the well-being and dignity of people experiencing homelessness. Overall, the article contributes to the growing literature that frames homelessness not only as a social issue but also as a spatial and urban governance challenge, highlighting how the design and management of public space influence the inclusion or exclusion of vulnerable populations in the city.

Hanley, J., Ives, N., Lenet, J., Hordyk, S.-R., Walsh, C., Ben Soltane, S., & Este, D. (2019). Migrant women's health and housing insecurity: an intersectional analysis. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care*, 15(1), 90–106.

Migrant women; intersectionality; housing insecurity and health

This article examines the relationship between housing insecurity and health among migrant women in Canada through an intersectional analytical framework. Drawing on qualitative research conducted with immigrant and refugee women, the study explores how gender, migration status, race, and socioeconomic conditions interact to shape experiences of housing precarity and access to health and social services. The findings show that migrant women often face multiple and overlapping barriers to secure housing, including precarious employment, limited knowledge of housing systems, language barriers, and discrimination in rental markets. These structural constraints can lead to overcrowded housing, unstable accommodation arrangements, or reliance on informal networks, all of which negatively affect physical and mental health.

The study also highlights how immigration status and gendered power relations influence women's vulnerability to housing instability. Some participants reported experiencing dependency on partners or employers for housing, which in certain cases increased exposure to exploitation or domestic violence. Overall, the article emphasizes that housing insecurity among migrant women must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by intersecting forms of inequality. The authors argue for policy and service interventions that address both housing access and broader social determinants of health, while incorporating gender-sensitive and culturally responsive approaches.

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2019). *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/index-eng.html>

National homelessness policy; community-based interventions; Housing First

Reaching Home is the federal government's national strategy to prevent and reduce homelessness in Canada. Launched in 2019, the program builds on the previous *Homelessness Partnering Strategy* and provides funding to communities to support local initiatives aimed at addressing homelessness through coordinated housing and support services. The strategy emphasizes a community-based approach, in which local organizations and municipalities identify priorities and allocate funding according to local needs. A central component of the program is the promotion of Housing First principles, prioritizing rapid access to permanent housing combined with individualized support services for people experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness.

Reaching Home also aims to improve data collection and accountability through the use of coordinated access systems and the expansion of Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) databases. These tools allow communities to track service use, better understand homelessness dynamics, and design targeted interventions. Overall, the strategy represents a shift in Canadian homelessness policy toward prevention, housing stability, and integrated service systems, while strengthening collaboration between federal, provincial, municipal, and community actors involved in homelessness responses.

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. (2024). *Shelter Capacity Report 2024*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

Emergency shelter systems; service capacity; homelessness monitoring

This report provides a national overview of emergency shelter capacity in Canada based on administrative data collected through the National Shelter Study and other federal data systems. It analyzes the number, distribution, and characteristics of emergency shelters across the country, as well as their capacity to respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The report documents the number of shelter facilities, available beds, and occupancy trends across Canadian communities. It highlights how shelter capacity has evolved over time in response to increasing demand, public health emergencies, and policy initiatives aimed at expanding temporary accommodation options.

The analysis also identifies variations across regions and shelter types, including facilities serving specific populations such as youth, women fleeing violence, and families. The report notes that many urban shelters operate close to or at full capacity, reflecting persistent pressures within the homelessness service system. Overall, the report provides an important empirical reference for understanding the infrastructure and operational capacity of emergency shelter systems in Canada. It underscores the role of shelters as a critical but temporary response to homelessness while reinforcing the need for long-term housing solutions and prevention strategies.

Hughes, J. (Ed.). (2026). *Mettre fin à l'itinérance au Canada : Plaidoyer pour la prévention de l'itinérance*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Homelessness prevention; policy transformation; structural determinants

This edited volume argues for a shift in Canadian homelessness policy from emergency responses toward systemic prevention strategies. Bringing together contributions from researchers and practitioners, the book examines the structural determinants of homelessness and highlights how social policies, housing systems, and institutional practices can either mitigate or exacerbate housing instability. The chapters emphasize that traditional responses centred on shelters and crisis management have limited capacity to reduce homelessness over the long term. Instead, the authors advocate for upstream interventions that address the root causes of housing insecurity, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, inadequate income supports, and systemic barriers affecting vulnerable populations.

The book also discusses the importance of coordinated policy frameworks that integrate housing, health, and social services, while strengthening data systems and community-level collaboration. Particular attention is given to prevention approaches such as early intervention, support for people exiting institutions, and policies that stabilize housing before individuals reach crisis situations. Overall, the volume contributes to the growing policy and research literature that frames homelessness as a preventable social problem, emphasizing the need for long-term structural reforms and coordinated prevention-oriented strategies in Canada.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. (2023). *Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2023*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

Immigration policy; demographic growth; settlement and integration

This annual report provides an overview of Canada's immigration system, presenting recent statistics, policy priorities, and projections related to immigration levels and settlement outcomes. The report outlines the federal government's immigration targets and policy frameworks that guide the admission of permanent

residents, temporary residents, refugees, and asylum seekers. The report highlights immigration as a central driver of Canada's population growth and economic development. It presents data on admissions by immigration category—including economic immigrants, family reunification, and protected persons—and discusses the increasing role of immigration in addressing labour market shortages and demographic aging.

In addition, the report describes the policy and program infrastructure supporting newcomer settlement and integration. These include language training, employment support programs, and partnerships with provinces and community organizations that facilitate social and economic inclusion. The document also situates immigration within broader demographic and social dynamics, noting the growing diversity of Canada's population and the geographic distribution of newcomers across provinces and cities. Overall, the report provides an important institutional and demographic context for understanding migration trends and their implications for housing demand, urban services, and social integration in Canadian cities.

Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2022). *Itinérance – Enquête québécoise sur la santé de la population (EQSP) 2020-2021*. Québec: Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Hidden homelessness; population survey data; prevalence estimates

This statistical brief presents findings on homelessness based on the Enquête québécoise sur la santé de la population (EQSP) 2020–2021). Unlike shelter-based statistics or point-in-time counts, the EQSP captures experiences of homelessness through a population survey, allowing researchers to estimate the prevalence of both visible and hidden homelessness among people aged 15 and over living in Québec. The report distinguishes between visible homelessness, defined as having lived without a fixed address in emergency shelters or places not intended for habitation (such as streets or vehicles), and hidden homelessness, referring to situations where individuals temporarily stay with others or in short-term accommodation due to the lack of stable housing. These categories are based on specific survey questions included in the EQSP questionnaire.

Survey results indicate that experiences of hidden homelessness are more common than visible homelessness. As illustrated in the chart on page 2, approximately 4.2% of Québec's population aged 15 and over reported having experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives, compared to roughly 1.3% who reported visible homelessness. When both forms are combined, about 4.6% of respondents reported having experienced some form of homelessness during their lifetime, with slightly higher prevalence among men than women. The report notes important methodological limitations: because the EQSP surveys individuals currently living in private dwellings, it does not capture people who were homeless at the time of the survey or those living in institutions. Nonetheless, it provides valuable insight into the broader prevalence of homelessness experiences within the general population, particularly hidden homelessness, which is often underestimated in administrative and shelter-based data.

Johnson, G., Gronda, H., & Coutts, S. (2008). *On the Outside: Pathways in and out of Homelessness*. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.

Homelessness trajectories; pathways approach; longitudinal research

This book examines homelessness as a dynamic process characterized by pathways into, through, and out of homelessness, rather than a fixed social condition. Drawing on longitudinal research and extensive qualitative material, the authors analyze how different life trajectories, social contexts, and institutional interactions shape individuals' experiences of homelessness. The study combines biographical narratives and longitudinal interviews with 103 homeless individuals, including follow-up interviews conducted twelve months after participants left transitional accommodation. This methodological approach allows the authors

to analyze how people adapt to homelessness over time and why some individuals manage to exit homelessness while others remain trapped in long-term housing instability.

A central contribution of the book is its analysis of diverse pathways into homelessness, emphasizing that the causes and trajectories of homelessness vary widely across individuals. The authors argue that commonly cited factors such as substance use, mental illness, or criminal behaviour should not always be understood as causes of homelessness, since in many cases they emerge as consequences or adaptations to prolonged homelessness. The book also highlights the role of stigma, social exclusion, and coping strategies in shaping how individuals experience homelessness and attempt to reintegrate into stable housing. By examining the everyday lives and responses of homeless individuals, the study challenges common stereotypes and underscores the resilience and agency of people navigating homelessness. Overall, *On the Outside* makes a significant contribution to homelessness research by advancing a pathways-based analytical framework, emphasizing the importance of longitudinal and life-course perspectives for understanding homelessness and designing effective policy interventions.

Kaur, H., Saad, A., Magwood, O., Alkhateeb, Q., Mathew, C., Khalaf, G., & Pottie, K. (2021). Understanding the health and housing experiences of refugees and other migrant populations experiencing homelessness or vulnerable housing: a systematic review using GRADE-CERQual. *CMAJ Open*, 9(2), E681–E692.

Migrant homelessness; health vulnerabilities; systematic review

This article presents a systematic review of qualitative studies examining the health and housing experiences of refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrant populations who are experiencing homelessness or living in precarious housing. Using the GRADE-CERQual framework, the authors assess the confidence and reliability of findings drawn from qualitative evidence on migrant housing insecurity and its health implications. The review synthesizes evidence from multiple studies conducted primarily in high-income countries and identifies several recurring themes in migrants' experiences of housing instability. These include structural barriers to accessing housing, such as discrimination in rental markets, restrictive immigration policies, limited income opportunities, and administrative barriers linked to legal status. These constraints often push migrants toward overcrowded, temporary, or unstable housing arrangements.

The study also highlights the strong relationship between housing precarity and health outcomes. Migrants experiencing homelessness frequently report elevated levels of psychological distress, social isolation, and barriers to accessing health care services. Language barriers, unfamiliarity with service systems, and fear related to immigration status further compound these challenges. Another important finding concerns the role of social networks and informal support systems, which often serve as temporary coping mechanisms but may also reproduce unstable housing arrangements such as couch surfing or overcrowded shared housing. Overall, the review demonstrates that homelessness among migrants is shaped by the intersection of migration status, housing markets, and health systems, and it calls for integrated policy responses that address housing access, legal protections, and culturally appropriate health and social services.

Kaushik, V., Walsh, C. A., & Hoselton, J. (2024). Housing insecurity and homelessness among older immigrants in Canada. In S. Guruge (Ed.), *Intersections of Aging and Immigration: The Promise–Paradox of a Better Life*. Toronto: Toronto Metropolitan University.

Older immigrants; housing insecurity; intersectionality

This chapter examines housing insecurity and homelessness among older immigrants in Canada, focusing on how aging, migration status, and socioeconomic vulnerability intersect to shape housing outcomes. The authors argue that older immigrants often experience a “promise–paradox”: migration may be associated

with expectations of improved quality of life, yet structural barriers frequently lead to economic precarity and housing instability later in life. The chapter highlights multiple factors contributing to housing insecurity among older immigrants, including limited pension eligibility, precarious employment histories, language barriers, discrimination, and weak access to social support networks. These factors can increase vulnerability to poverty and housing instability, particularly among immigrants who arrived later in life or under family sponsorship programs.

A conceptual model presented in the chapter illustrates the multi-layered nature of housing insecurity, distinguishing between micro-, meso-, and macro-level influences. At the micro level, individual factors such as poverty, disability, language barriers, and gender intersect with migration-related vulnerabilities. At the meso level, limited access to community resources and family support can intensify housing precarity. At the macro level, broader systemic factors—such as discriminatory housing markets, insufficient public policies, and ageism—shape structural risks for homelessness among older immigrants. The diagram on page 7 visually represents these interacting levels of influence. Overall, the chapter emphasizes the importance of intersectional policy responses that address the combined effects of aging, migration status, and socioeconomic inequality. It calls for housing policies and social programs that better account for the specific needs of older immigrant populations, particularly in large urban centres where housing costs are high and immigrant populations are concentrated.

Khan, B. M., Wasserman, J., & Patel, M. (2022). Perspectives of Refugee Youth Experiencing Homelessness: A Qualitative Study of Factors Impacting Mental Health and Resilience. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13.

Refugee youth; homelessness; mental health and resilience

This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of refugee youth experiencing homelessness, focusing on the factors that influence their mental health and resilience. Based on interviews with refugee youth in Canada who had experienced housing instability or homelessness, the study examines how migration experiences, structural barriers, and social environments shape psychological well-being. The findings highlight multiple challenges faced by refugee youth, including trauma related to forced migration, difficulties navigating unfamiliar social and institutional systems, discrimination, and barriers to stable housing. These factors contribute to heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. At the same time, participants described the stress associated with uncertain immigration status, limited family support networks, and challenges in accessing education or employment.

Despite these difficulties, the study identifies several sources of resilience among refugee youth experiencing homelessness. These include strong personal aspirations, supportive relationships with peers or mentors, and access to community organizations that provide culturally sensitive services and social support. Overall, the article emphasizes that refugee youth experiencing homelessness face intersecting vulnerabilities related to migration, age, and housing precarity. The authors argue that mental health and housing interventions should adopt trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches while strengthening support systems that help refugee youth transition toward stable housing and social integration.

Kidd, S. A., Bezgrebelna, M., Galvao, L. A., Hajat, S., Hale, M., Keevers, L., Settembrino, M., Solomon, N., Vickery, J., Wells, S., & Yamamoto, S. (2022). *Climate change and homelessness: A global response framework – Exposure subsection*. Global Climate-Homelessness Initiative Group.

Climate change; environmental exposure; homelessness vulnerability

This report presents a conceptual framework examining how climate change increases the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness and precarious housing, particularly through heightened exposure to extreme weather events and environmental hazards. Developed by the Global Climate-Homelessness Initiative Group, the document provides guidance for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners on integrating homelessness considerations into climate adaptation and response strategies. The framework highlights that individuals lacking stable shelter are disproportionately exposed to climatic risks, including extreme heat, cold, floods, droughts, air pollution, and infectious diseases linked to environmental changes. These risks have significant consequences for health and safety, including increased illness, injury, mortality, and mental health challenges. The report distinguishes between primary climatic risks (such as temperature extremes and natural disasters) and secondary risks (such as food and water insecurity, disease exposure, and social conflict) that disproportionately affect homeless populations.

The framework also outlines systemic challenges faced by governments and service providers. Emergency systems and social services often lack adequate resources and coordination to respond effectively to climate-related risks affecting homeless populations, while existing social inequalities and stigma further compound vulnerability. To address these issues, the report proposes several policy directions. These include preventing further housing instability, improving access to climate-resilient housing, integrating homelessness into disaster planning, and developing cross-sector collaboration between housing, health, and environmental policy systems. The document emphasizes that prevention-oriented strategies—such as housing policies, poverty reduction, and supportive housing models like Housing First—are essential to reduce exposure to climate risks. Overall, the framework positions homelessness as a critical dimension of climate vulnerability and environmental justice, arguing that effective climate adaptation strategies must incorporate housing stability, social equity, and community-based responses.

Kikano, F., Fauveaud, G., & Lizarralde, G. (2021). Policies of Exclusion: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(1), 422–452.

Refugee governance; exclusionary policies; informal housing

This article examines how national and local policies in Lebanon have shaped the living conditions of Syrian refugees through mechanisms of exclusion and spatial marginalization. Drawing on fieldwork and policy analysis, the authors explore how governance frameworks, legal restrictions, and humanitarian interventions interact to structure refugee settlement patterns and access to housing. The study shows that Lebanese authorities have implemented a series of policies designed to discourage the permanent settlement of Syrian refugees, including restrictions on formal refugee camps, limitations on legal residency, and regulations affecting employment and mobility. These policies have forced many refugees to rely on informal housing arrangements, such as temporary settlements, overcrowded apartments, or precarious rental situations, often characterized by poor living conditions and insecurity of tenure.

The authors argue that these policy choices constitute a form of “governance through exclusion,” whereby the absence of formal integration policies and the imposition of regulatory barriers effectively push refugees into informal and unstable housing environments. Humanitarian actors have attempted to mitigate these conditions through shelter assistance programs, yet their interventions remain constrained by the broader political framework. Overall, the article highlights how state policies, legal status, and urban governance structures can actively produce housing precarity among displaced populations. The findings underscore the importance of examining refugee housing not only as a humanitarian issue but also as a product of political decisions that shape spatial inclusion and exclusion in host societies.

MacDonald, S., Bellot, C., & Sylvestre, M. E. (2024). *L’itinérance au Québec: Réalités, ruptures et citoyenneté*. Montréal: Presses de l’Université du Québec.

Homelessness in Québec; social exclusion; citizenship

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of homelessness in Québec, examining its social, institutional, and political dimensions. Drawing on interdisciplinary research in sociology, criminology, and social policy, the authors analyze how homelessness is shaped by processes of social rupture, structural inequality, and limited access to citizenship rights. The book emphasizes that homelessness should not be understood solely as the absence of housing but rather as a process of cumulative ruptures affecting individuals' relationships with family, employment, institutions, and social networks. These ruptures often lead to progressive marginalization and difficulties in accessing housing, healthcare, and social support systems.

A central theme of the book is the relationship between homelessness and citizenship. The authors argue that people experiencing homelessness frequently encounter barriers that limit their effective participation in social and civic life. Administrative requirements, policing practices, and regulatory frameworks governing public space can contribute to forms of exclusion that reinforce marginalization. The volume also examines the diversity of homelessness trajectories in Québec, highlighting differences related to gender, age, Indigenous identity, and migration status. It discusses how institutional responses—such as emergency shelters, social services, and housing programs—both address and sometimes reproduce structural inequalities within the homelessness system. Overall, the book contributes to the Québec and Canadian literature by framing homelessness as a social and political issue linked to broader questions of inequality, rights, and belonging, while emphasizing the need for policies that strengthen social inclusion and housing stability.

Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., & Keys, D. (2005). Young people, drug use and family conflict: Pathways into homelessness. *Journal of Adolescence*, 28(2), 185–199.

Youth homelessness; family conflict; drug use trajectories

This article examines the relationship between drug and alcohol use, family conflict, and pathways into homelessness among young people. Based on qualitative interviews with 302 homeless youth aged 12–20 in Melbourne, Australia, the study analyzes the narratives through which young people explain their departure from home and the processes that led to their homelessness. Through thematic analysis of interview transcripts, the authors identify four principal pathways linking drug use, family dynamics, and homelessness:

1. Young person's drug or alcohol use → family conflict → homelessness
2. Family conflict → young person's drug or alcohol use → homelessness
3. Family conflict → homelessness → young person's drug use
4. Family member's drug or alcohol use → family conflict → homelessness

Across these pathways, family conflict emerges as the central factor in young people's departure from home. The study shows that drug use is not always the primary cause of homelessness; rather, it often interacts with other factors such as family breakdown, domestic violence, parental substance abuse, or tensions related to independence and behavioral expectations. Only about one-third of participants linked their homelessness directly to personal or familial drug use, highlighting the complexity of youth homelessness trajectories. The research also shows that drug use can function in different ways across trajectories: in some cases as a source of conflict with parents, in others as a coping strategy developed after becoming homeless, particularly within street or shelter environments. Overall, the article contributes to the pathways approach to youth homelessness, demonstrating that homelessness among young people emerges through complex interactions between family relationships, substance use, and broader social dynamics rather than through a single causal factor.

Milton, A. (2023). The Homeless Asylum-Seekers of Canada. *New Lines Magazine*.

Asylum seekers; homelessness crisis; urban shelter systems

This journalistic article examines the growing phenomenon of asylum seekers experiencing homelessness in Canadian cities, focusing particularly on the situation in Toronto. Through interviews with asylum seekers, community organizations, and policymakers, the article documents how recent arrivals—especially refugees from African countries—have increasingly been forced to sleep in public spaces due to limited shelter capacity and delays in accessing housing and support services. The article highlights the structural pressures on Canada’s urban shelter systems, which have struggled to accommodate the rapid increase in asylum claims in recent years. Municipal shelters in cities such as Toronto reached or exceeded capacity, leaving many newcomers without immediate access to emergency housing. As a result, some asylum seekers have been temporarily housed in churches, community spaces, or improvised encampments.

Milton also discusses the institutional and jurisdictional tensions between federal, provincial, and municipal governments regarding responsibility for housing asylum seekers. While immigration policy is managed at the federal level, cities often bear the immediate burden of providing shelter and social services. This mismatch has contributed to gaps in support and delays in coordinating housing solutions. The article further illustrates how immigration status, administrative processes, and limited access to employment or social benefits during the asylum process can heighten the risk of homelessness among newly arrived migrants. Community organizations and refugee advocates cited in the article argue that the crisis reveals the need for stronger coordination between immigration policy and housing systems. Overall, the piece provides a contemporary account of the emerging intersection between asylum migration and homelessness in Canada, highlighting how systemic housing shortages and institutional fragmentation can produce situations of visible homelessness among recently arrived refugee populations.

Newbold, K. B. (2010). Linking immigrant settlement, health, housing, and homelessness in Canada. *Canadian Issues*, 28.

Immigrant settlement; health determinants; housing and homelessness

This article examines the interconnections between immigrant settlement, health outcomes, housing conditions, and homelessness in Canada, arguing that these domains are often studied separately despite being closely linked. Newbold highlights how health status, socioeconomic conditions, and settlement patterns interact to influence immigrants’ housing trajectories and potential risk of homelessness. The article begins by discussing the “healthy immigrant effect,” a widely documented phenomenon whereby immigrants typically arrive in Canada with better health indicators than the native-born population. However, this health advantage tends to decline relatively quickly after arrival, often within five years. Factors contributing to this decline include socioeconomic stress, labour market barriers, loss of social status, language difficulties, and limited access to culturally appropriate health care.

Newbold argues that declining health and barriers to health care can have important consequences for housing stability. Poor physical or mental health may reduce employment opportunities and income, increasing the risk of housing precarity and homelessness. Conversely, adequate housing conditions are essential for maintaining good health, illustrating the reciprocal relationship between housing and health. The article also identifies several structural mechanisms linking immigrant settlement and homelessness. These include limited access to affordable housing in major metropolitan areas, discrimination in housing markets, settlement in marginalized neighbourhoods, and limited social support networks. Many immigrants rely on informal housing arrangements with family or friends, which may mask forms of hidden homelessness, particularly among recent arrivals. Overall, the article argues that immigrants and refugees constitute potentially vulnerable populations facing intersecting health and housing challenges, particularly

during the early settlement period. It calls for policy approaches that address these interconnected dimensions by integrating housing policy, health services, and immigrant settlement programs.

O’Sullivan, E., Nelson, G., Aubry, T., Estecahandy, P., Laval, C., Shinn, M., & Tsemberis, S. (2021). How social science can influence homelessness policy: experiences from Europe, Canada, and the United States – Part II: Politics and Policy Change. *European Journal of Homelessness*, 15(2).

Homelessness policy; knowledge translation; Housing First

This article examines how social science research has influenced homelessness policy development in Europe, Canada, and the United States, focusing on the political and institutional conditions that enable research findings to shape public policy. Building on earlier analyses of knowledge production, the authors explore how academic research, policy advocacy, and governmental decision-making interact in the formulation of homelessness strategies. The paper highlights the role of evidence-based policy frameworks, particularly the spread of the Housing First model, which emphasizes immediate access to permanent housing without preconditions such as treatment compliance or sobriety. Drawing on experiences from multiple countries, the authors show how rigorous evaluation studies—especially randomized controlled trials and longitudinal research—helped legitimize Housing First as an effective alternative to traditional shelter-based or transitional housing approaches.

At the same time, the article emphasizes that research evidence alone does not automatically translate into policy change. The authors identify several factors that shape the uptake of research, including political leadership, policy entrepreneurs, institutional networks, advocacy coalitions, and the alignment between research findings and existing policy agendas. In many cases, partnerships between researchers, service providers, and government agencies were crucial for transforming research into actionable policy frameworks. Overall, the article demonstrates that policy change in the homelessness sector emerges from the interaction between scientific evidence, political processes, and institutional contexts. It argues that effective knowledge mobilization requires sustained collaboration between researchers and policymakers, as well as the strategic communication of research findings to influence public debates and policy agendas.

OPPL. (2026). *Rapport de la démarche participative sur l’itinérance et la cohabitation sociale*. Longueuil, QC: Office de participation publique de Longueuil.

Public participation; urban governance; social coexistence

This report presents the results of a public consultation process on homelessness and social coexistence in the city of Longueuil, organized by the Office de participation publique de Longueuil (OPPL). The participatory initiative aimed to gather the perspectives of residents, community organizations, public institutions, and people experiencing homelessness in order to inform municipal policies addressing the growing challenges associated with homelessness in the urban environment. The report documents the main concerns expressed during the consultation process, particularly tensions related to the shared use of public space, the visibility of homelessness in urban areas, and the coexistence between people experiencing homelessness, residents, businesses, and local institutions. Participants highlighted the need to balance public safety concerns with approaches that respect the dignity and rights of vulnerable populations.

Several structural factors contributing to homelessness in the region were identified, including rising housing costs, limited availability of affordable housing, mental health and addiction challenges, and insufficient access to social and health services. Community organizations emphasized the importance of strengthening prevention strategies and expanding support services to reduce the risk of homelessness. The report also outlines a series of recommendations emerging from the consultation process. These include improving

coordination between municipal authorities and community organizations, expanding access to supportive housing, strengthening outreach and social services, and developing urban planning approaches that promote more inclusive public spaces. Overall, the report illustrates how participatory governance mechanisms can contribute to shaping local responses to homelessness, highlighting the importance of dialogue between municipal governments, civil society, and affected populations in addressing complex urban social issues.

Pophaim, J.-P., & Peacock, R. (2021). Pathways into and out of homelessness: towards a strategic approach to reducing homelessness. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology*, 34(2), 68–87.

Homelessness pathways; structural drivers; prevention strategies

This article examines the pathways that lead individuals into and out of homelessness, arguing that homelessness should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by interacting structural, institutional, and personal factors rather than as a static condition. Drawing on existing research and policy analysis, the authors propose a strategic framework for addressing homelessness that focuses on both prevention and long-term housing stability. The article identifies several structural drivers of homelessness, including poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and weaknesses in social protection systems. These structural factors interact with individual circumstances such as family breakdown, mental health challenges, substance use, and experiences with the criminal justice system. The authors argue that homelessness often results from the accumulation of vulnerabilities and institutional failures rather than a single triggering event.

The paper also highlights the importance of understanding pathways out of homelessness, emphasizing that successful exits typically involve stable housing, access to employment opportunities, social support networks, and effective social services. Without coordinated support systems, individuals leaving homelessness may cycle back into unstable housing situations. Based on this analysis, the authors advocate for a strategic and preventative approach to homelessness policy. Key recommendations include strengthening early intervention programs, expanding access to affordable housing, improving coordination between social services and justice systems, and developing integrated support programs that address both housing and broader social needs. Overall, the article contributes to the pathways literature by emphasizing that effective homelessness policy must address both the structural conditions that produce homelessness and the institutional mechanisms that enable sustainable exits from it.

Preston, V., Murdie, R., Wedlock, J., Agrawal, S., Anucha, U. Z. O., D'Addario, S., Kwak, M. J., Logan, J., & Murnaghan, A. M. (2009). Immigrants and homelessness—at risk in Canada's outer suburbs. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, 53(3), 288–304.

Immigrant housing vulnerability; suburban poverty; hidden homelessness

This article examines the risk of homelessness among immigrants living in Canada's outer suburban areas, challenging the common assumption that homelessness is primarily an inner-city phenomenon. Focusing on the Greater Toronto Area, the authors analyze how settlement patterns, housing market dynamics, and labour market barriers place some immigrant households at heightened risk of housing instability. The study shows that many newcomers settle in suburban municipalities where housing costs are relatively lower than in central cities. However, these areas often lack adequate social services, public transportation, and affordable housing options, which can increase vulnerability to housing precarity. The authors highlight that immigrants in suburban areas may experience forms of hidden homelessness, including overcrowded housing, temporary stays with relatives or friends, and unstable rental arrangements.

Several structural factors contribute to this risk. These include labour market barriers, underemployment, limited recognition of foreign credentials, and discrimination in housing markets. These challenges often lead to lower household incomes and limited access to stable housing, particularly during the early settlement period. The article also emphasizes the spatial mismatch between immigrant settlement patterns and the location of social services. Many homelessness services and emergency shelters are concentrated in central urban areas, making them less accessible to immigrants living in suburban regions. Overall, the study highlights the need for policy responses that address housing insecurity among immigrants beyond the urban core, including expanded affordable housing, improved transportation access, and better distribution of settlement and social services across metropolitan regions.

Reesor-McDowell, A., & Taylor, L. (2024). Opinion: Refugee claimants in Ottawa need not be homeless. *Ottawa Citizen*.

Refugee claimants; settlement support; transitional housing

This opinion article argues that refugee claimants arriving in Canadian cities do not inevitably become homeless, and that homelessness among newcomers is largely the result of institutional gaps in settlement support rather than immigration itself. Responding to public debate in Ottawa about the increasing presence of asylum seekers in emergency shelters, the authors emphasize that early and coordinated support systems are critical for preventing homelessness among newly arrived claimants. The article highlights that Canada already operates effective integration systems for government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees, who receive housing, settlement guidance, and social support immediately upon arrival. In contrast, refugee claimants who seek asylum after arriving in Canada often lack access to a comparable national support system, leaving them without coordinated assistance, funding for services, or clear pathways to housing and employment.

Community-based organizations play a key role in filling this gap. Transitional shelters and grassroots programs provide temporary accommodation, settlement information, and assistance navigating the refugee claim process. These initiatives help many claimants stabilize their situation within a few months and transition to employment and independent housing. The authors argue that such programs are both more effective and less costly than relying on emergency shelters or hotel placements. The article concludes that preventing homelessness among refugee claimants requires a coordinated national strategy that invests in transitional housing and strengthens partnerships with community organizations already working with newcomers. By improving access to information, settlement services, and early housing support, governments could significantly reduce the number of asylum seekers entering the homelessness system while facilitating faster social and economic integration.

Schmidt, K. (2025). Corporeo-cartographies of homelessness: women's embodied experiences of homelessness and urban space. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 32(3), 366–388.

Embodied homelessness; gendered urban space; feminist geography

This article examines homelessness through a feminist geographic perspective, focusing on how women experiencing homelessness navigate and experience urban space through their bodies. Schmidt introduces the concept of “corporeo-cartographies”, a methodological and theoretical approach that maps the embodied, emotional, and spatial experiences of homeless women in the city. Drawing on qualitative research methods, including interviews and spatial narratives, the study highlights how homelessness is shaped not only by housing deprivation but also by gendered experiences of safety, visibility, and vulnerability in public space. Women experiencing homelessness must constantly negotiate urban environments marked by risks of violence, surveillance, and social stigma. As a result, their daily spatial

practices often involve strategic decisions about where to rest, seek shelter, or access services while minimizing exposure to danger.

The article emphasizes that these spatial strategies are deeply embodied and affective, reflecting feelings of fear, exhaustion, resilience, and agency. By documenting how women move through and perceive urban environments, Schmidt demonstrates that homelessness is lived as a corporeal and relational experience, shaped by interactions with urban infrastructures, social norms, and institutional actors. The concept of corporeo-cartographies provides a methodological contribution by proposing ways to map homelessness beyond conventional spatial data, incorporating lived experiences, bodily perceptions, and emotional geographies. This approach challenges dominant representations of homelessness that focus primarily on shelter use or geographic distribution. Overall, the study contributes to the literature by highlighting the gendered dimensions of homelessness and the importance of embodied spatial analysis for understanding how marginalized populations inhabit and navigate urban environments.

SCPI. (2003). *Best Practices for Working with Homeless Immigrants and Refugees. A Community-Based Action-Research Project – Phase I: Research*. Toronto: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI).

Immigrant homelessness; service provision; community-based practices

This report presents the results of a community-based action research project aimed at identifying effective practices for supporting immigrants and refugees experiencing homelessness in Canada. Conducted under the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), the study draws on interviews with service providers, community organizations, and immigrants who have experienced housing instability in order to understand the specific barriers faced by these populations and the responses developed by frontline organizations. The report highlights that immigrants and refugees experiencing homelessness often encounter distinct challenges compared to the general homeless population. These include language barriers, unfamiliarity with Canadian institutions, limited social networks, immigration status uncertainties, and discrimination in housing and employment markets. Such factors can increase vulnerability to housing instability, particularly during the early settlement period.

A central contribution of the report is the identification of best practices for service provision. These include culturally appropriate outreach strategies, multilingual services, collaboration between settlement agencies and homelessness service providers, and programs that integrate housing support with employment assistance, legal advice, and settlement information. The report also stresses the importance of building trust with immigrant communities and ensuring that services are accessible regardless of immigration status. The research emphasizes the role of community organizations and local partnerships in responding effectively to immigrant homelessness. Inter-agency collaboration, knowledge sharing, and coordinated service delivery are identified as key elements for addressing complex needs that span housing, immigration processes, health care, and social integration. Overall, the report contributes early evidence to the Canadian literature on immigrant and refugee homelessness, highlighting the need for integrated service models that bridge the settlement sector and homelessness support systems while recognizing the cultural and institutional barriers faced by newcomers.

SHERPA. (2024). *Les expériences de personnes appartenant à un groupe ethnoculturel minoritaire qui prennent soin d'un-e proche au Québec*. Montréal: Institut universitaire SHERPA.

Ethnocultural minorities; caregiving; social inequalities

This report examines the experiences of informal caregivers belonging to ethnocultural minority groups in Québec, focusing on the challenges they face when providing care to relatives with health or dependency

needs. Based on qualitative interviews and community-based research, the study explores how caregiving practices intersect with migration histories, cultural expectations, and institutional barriers in the Québec health and social services system. The report highlights that caregivers from ethnocultural minority backgrounds often assume significant responsibilities within family networks, sometimes in the absence of adequate formal support. Cultural norms related to family solidarity and caregiving can reinforce expectations that family members—particularly women—will provide care for aging parents, spouses, or relatives with disabilities.

At the same time, the study identifies several structural challenges that can complicate caregiving among minority populations. These include language barriers, limited knowledge of available services, difficulties navigating administrative procedures, and experiences of discrimination within health and social service institutions. Immigration status and socioeconomic conditions can further intensify these challenges. The report emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive and accessible support services, including interpretation services, community outreach, and better coordination between health institutions and community organizations. It also calls for policies that recognize the diversity of caregiving experiences and address the specific needs of ethnocultural minority populations. Overall, the report contributes to understanding how migration, cultural norms, and institutional structures shape caregiving experiences, highlighting broader issues of social inequality and access to services within Québec's health and social support systems.

Shinn, M., & Khadduri, J. (2020). *In the Midst of Plenty: Homelessness and What to Do About It*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Structural homelessness; housing policy; prevention strategies

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of the structural causes of homelessness in the United States and proposes evidence-based strategies for preventing and reducing homelessness. Shinn and Khadduri argue that homelessness persists not primarily because of individual deficiencies but because of systemic failures in housing markets and social policy, particularly the shortage of affordable housing for low-income households. Drawing on decades of research, the authors demonstrate that homelessness is closely linked to structural economic factors, including rising housing costs, stagnant wages among low-income workers, and reductions in public housing and housing subsidies. While individual challenges such as mental illness, substance use, or family conflict may contribute to housing instability, these factors alone cannot explain the scale of homelessness without considering broader housing market dynamics.

A key contribution of the book is its focus on prevention-oriented policy approaches. The authors highlight the effectiveness of strategies such as housing subsidies, eviction prevention programs, rapid rehousing initiatives, and supportive housing for people with complex needs. Evidence from longitudinal studies and policy evaluations shows that these interventions can significantly reduce homelessness when implemented at sufficient scale. The book also emphasizes the importance of integrating housing policy with social services, particularly for populations facing multiple vulnerabilities, such as families with children, people with disabilities, and individuals leaving institutions such as prisons or hospitals. The authors argue that homelessness can be substantially reduced if governments prioritize housing stability as a central component of social policy. Overall, *In the Midst of Plenty* advances a structural understanding of homelessness and advocates for policy responses centered on expanding affordable housing, strengthening safety nets, and investing in preventative interventions, rather than relying primarily on emergency shelter systems.

Shinn, M., Knickman, J. R., & Weitzman, B. C. (1991). Social relationships and vulnerability to becoming homeless among poor families. *American Psychologist*, 46(11), 1180–1187.

Family homelessness; social networks; structural vulnerability

This article examines how social relationships and support networks influence the risk of homelessness among low-income families in the United States. Drawing on empirical research with poor families in New York City, the authors analyze why some families experiencing economic hardship become homeless while others in similar financial circumstances are able to remain housed. The study finds that social support networks play a crucial protective role. Families with access to relatives or friends who can provide temporary housing, financial assistance, or childcare support are significantly less likely to enter the shelter system. In contrast, families with weak or disrupted social ties—often due to conflict, domestic violence, or prior housing instability—are more vulnerable to homelessness when facing economic shocks such as eviction, unemployment, or health crises.

The authors also highlight how structural factors interact with family dynamics. Poverty, lack of affordable housing, and limited welfare benefits create conditions in which even small crises can precipitate homelessness. In such contexts, the presence or absence of supportive social relationships becomes a critical determinant of housing outcomes. Importantly, the article challenges explanations of family homelessness that focus solely on individual pathology or family dysfunction. Instead, it proposes that homelessness among poor families results from the interaction between structural housing constraints and the erosion of social support systems. Overall, the study contributed significantly to the literature by demonstrating that social networks function as informal safety nets for low-income families. It suggests that policies aimed at preventing homelessness should address both structural housing affordability and the strengthening of community and family support systems.

Smith, A., & Kopec, A. (2023). Mapping Homelessness Research in Canada. *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 53(1), 42–62.

Research trends; knowledge production; Canadian homelessness studies

This article provides a systematic mapping of academic research on homelessness in Canada, analyzing how the field has evolved over time and identifying the dominant themes, methodological approaches, and geographic focuses within the literature. Smith and Kopec examine publications produced by Canadian scholars and institutions in order to understand how homelessness has been conceptualized and studied across different disciplines. The authors show that homelessness research in Canada has expanded significantly since the early 2000s, reflecting increased public awareness and policy attention. The literature spans multiple disciplines—including sociology, public health, urban studies, and social work—but tends to concentrate around several recurring themes such as housing policy, mental health and substance use, service provision, and the effectiveness of interventions like Housing First.

The study also identifies important gaps in the Canadian research landscape. While significant attention has been devoted to chronic homelessness and service delivery systems, less research has focused on structural determinants such as housing markets, migration, and broader socioeconomic transformations. The authors also note that research tends to be geographically concentrated in major metropolitan areas, particularly Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal. Another key finding is the growing influence of policy-oriented and applied research, often conducted in collaboration with government agencies and community organizations. This reflects the increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy in the homelessness sector, particularly through initiatives linked to national strategies and research networks. Overall, the article contributes a meta-analysis of the Canadian homelessness research field, highlighting how knowledge production shapes both public understanding and policy responses to homelessness, while also pointing to areas where further research is needed to address emerging issues such as migration, hidden homelessness, and housing affordability.

Springer, J., Lum, J., & Roswell, T. (2013). Policy challenges to homelessness among Caribbean youth in Toronto.

Youth homelessness; racialized communities; structural inequality

This chapter examines the specific policy challenges related to homelessness among Caribbean youth in Toronto, highlighting how racialization, migration histories, and systemic inequalities shape pathways into homelessness. Drawing on community research and service-provider perspectives, the authors argue that homelessness among Caribbean youth cannot be understood solely through individual risk factors but must be analyzed within the broader context of structural racism, poverty, and exclusion in housing and labour markets. The chapter identifies several factors that contribute to the vulnerability of Caribbean youth to homelessness. These include family conflict, experiences within the child welfare system, school disengagement, and discrimination in employment and housing. The authors also point out that many Caribbean youth face racial profiling and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, which can further limit access to stable housing and social opportunities.

Another important theme is the inadequacy of mainstream homelessness services in responding to the cultural and social realities of racialized youth. The authors argue that existing programs often fail to address issues such as racism, identity, and the specific support needs of immigrant and second-generation youth. The chapter therefore calls for more culturally responsive and community-based approaches to homelessness prevention and intervention. These include stronger collaboration with Caribbean community organizations, targeted youth programs, and policies that address systemic inequalities affecting racialized populations. Overall, the study highlights how youth homelessness among Caribbean communities in Toronto reflects broader patterns of racialized inequality and structural exclusion, suggesting that effective policy responses must address both housing precarity and the social conditions that shape the experiences of racialized youth.

Uppal, S. (2022). *A portrait of Canadians who have been homeless. Insights on Canadian Society.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Homelessness statistics; demographic profile; housing precarity

This report provides a statistical profile of Canadians who have experienced homelessness, using national survey data to examine the demographic, socioeconomic, and health characteristics associated with housing instability. Drawing on data from the Canadian Housing Survey, the analysis offers one of the most comprehensive quantitative portraits of homelessness in Canada, including both current and past experiences of homelessness. The findings show that homelessness in Canada is strongly associated with economic vulnerability and social disadvantage. Individuals who have experienced homelessness are more likely to have lower incomes, unstable employment, and limited educational attainment. The report also highlights the relationship between homelessness and health challenges, including higher prevalence of chronic health conditions, mental health difficulties, and disability.

The analysis identifies important demographic patterns. Indigenous peoples are significantly overrepresented among those who have experienced homelessness. Younger adults and single individuals are also more likely to report episodes of homelessness compared to older adults or families. In addition, people who have experienced childhood adversity or family disruption show higher risks of housing instability later in life. The report emphasizes that many individuals who experience homelessness do not remain chronically homeless but instead face temporary episodes of housing instability, often linked to economic shocks, relationship breakdown, or transitions between housing situations. This highlights the importance of distinguishing between different forms of homelessness, including episodic and transitional homelessness. Overall, the report contributes valuable national-level statistical evidence on homelessness in Canada, supporting policy discussions about prevention strategies, affordable housing supply, and targeted interventions for populations at heightened risk of housing instability.

Ville de Montréal. (2024). *Consultation sur les conditions de succès visant à assurer une intégration harmonieuse des ressources dédiées aux personnes en situation d'itinérance dans les quartiers de la métropole.* Montréal, QC: Office de consultation publique de Montréal.

Urban governance; social coexistence; homelessness services

This document was prepared by the City of Montréal as background material for a public consultation organized by the Office de consultation publique de Montréal (OCPM). The consultation aims to identify the conditions necessary to ensure the harmonious integration of homelessness-related services within neighbourhoods across the metropolitan area, particularly in a context of rising homelessness and expanding service infrastructures. The report provides an overview of the institutional and urban context of homelessness in Montréal. It defines homelessness as a process of social disaffiliation characterized by the lack of stable, secure, and adequate housing, as well as difficulties maintaining functional relationships within the community. The document distinguishes between visible homelessness (such as sleeping in shelters or public spaces) and hidden homelessness, including temporary stays with acquaintances, overcrowded housing, or temporary accommodation in hotels or motels.

Using recent data from the 2022 point-in-time count, the report highlights the scale of the issue: approximately 4,690 people were experiencing visible homelessness in Montréal, within an estimated total of about 10,000 individuals across Québec, representing a significant increase since 2018. The document also underscores the strong link between housing shortages and the rise in homelessness, noting that eviction, insufficient income, and substance-use issues are among the most frequently cited causes of housing loss. A central focus of the report is the territorial distribution and implementation of services for people experiencing homelessness, including emergency and transitional shelters, warming or respite centres, day centres, and temporary modular housing with support services. The number of emergency and transitional beds in Montréal increased from about 900 in 2018 to approximately 1,500 in 2024, reflecting the expansion of services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The document also addresses the growing challenge of social acceptability and coexistence in urban neighbourhoods. As homelessness services expand beyond the downtown core into other boroughs, tensions sometimes arise among residents, businesses, and local institutions regarding safety, public space use, and neighbourhood change. The consultation therefore seeks to gather public input on how to improve cohabitation, communication, and planning processes when establishing homelessness services. Overall, the report frames homelessness as a complex, multi-level governance issue requiring coordination among federal, provincial, municipal, and community actors. It emphasizes that long-term solutions depend on expanding affordable housing, strengthening social services, and fostering constructive dialogue between communities and institutions in order to support a more inclusive urban environment.

Wachsmuth, D., Chellew, C., St-Hilaire, C., Adair, M., Kerrigan, D., & Buglioni, B. (2024). *Flows between housing types: Exploring transitions in the Canadian housing continuum.* Montréal, QC: Urban Politics and Governance Research Group, McGill University.

Housing continuum; residential mobility; structural housing dynamics

This report analyzes transitions between different housing situations within the Canadian housing continuum, focusing on how households move between forms of housing such as ownership, rental housing, subsidized housing, shelters, and other temporary accommodations. Using statistical analysis of housing data, the study examines the “flows” between housing types in order to better understand patterns of housing instability and the structural dynamics shaping residential mobility in Canada. The authors argue that the housing system should not be understood as a set of static categories but rather as a dynamic

continuum characterized by movement between housing situations. Individuals and households frequently transition across housing types due to factors such as rising rents, income changes, family transitions, or eviction. Understanding these flows helps reveal how housing insecurity emerges and how some households may gradually move toward more precarious forms of housing.

A key contribution of the report is its empirical analysis of upward and downward mobility within the housing system. While some households move toward more stable housing situations, others experience downward transitions, for example from homeownership to rental housing or from rental housing to precarious or temporary accommodation. These downward flows are often associated with broader structural pressures such as housing market tightening and affordability crises. The report also highlights how structural housing shortages and rising costs limit the capacity of the housing system to absorb households experiencing economic shocks. In contexts where affordable housing supply is insufficient, households may be pushed into overcrowded housing, informal arrangements, or emergency shelters. Overall, the study contributes to the understanding of housing insecurity by emphasizing the importance of analyzing housing systems as dynamic processes of movement within the housing continuum, rather than focusing exclusively on discrete categories such as homelessness or homeownership. This perspective helps inform policy discussions about housing affordability, prevention of homelessness, and the design of interventions that support stable housing trajectories.

Walsh, C. A., Hanley, J., Ives, N., & Hordyk, S. R. (2016). Exploring the Experiences of Newcomer Women with Insecure Housing in Montréal, Canada. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 17(3), 887–904.

Housing insecurity; migrant women; intersectional vulnerability

This article explores the housing insecurity experienced by newcomer women in Montréal, focusing on how migration status, gender, and social marginalization intersect to shape precarious housing trajectories. Based on qualitative interviews with immigrant and refugee women, the study examines the structural and personal factors that contribute to housing instability during the settlement process. The authors show that many newcomer women experience severe barriers to accessing stable housing, particularly during the early stages of migration. These barriers include limited financial resources, lack of knowledge about the housing system, language barriers, discrimination in rental markets, and restrictive immigration policies. Women with dependent children or precarious immigration status often face additional challenges in securing safe and affordable housing.

The study also highlights the hidden nature of housing insecurity among migrant women. Rather than entering emergency shelters, many women rely on informal arrangements such as temporarily staying with relatives, acquaintances, or community members. These situations often involve overcrowding, instability, and exposure to exploitative conditions, making them forms of hidden homelessness that are frequently underrepresented in official statistics. Another important finding concerns the interconnection between housing, health, and social integration. Housing instability negatively affects mental health, family stability, and the ability of newcomer women to participate in employment, education, or community life. At the same time, the authors note the importance of social networks and community organizations in helping women navigate the housing system and access support services. Overall, the article underscores that housing insecurity among newcomer women is shaped by structural inequalities related to gender, migration status, and economic precarity. The authors argue that policies addressing homelessness and housing instability must adopt an intersectional perspective and develop targeted interventions that better respond to the specific needs of migrant women and their families.

APPENDIX C. GLOSSARY

The following definitions derive from the Homelessness Glossary for Communities by Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, dated July 2024

In alphabetical order

Affordable housing

Units or rooms where rent is affordable to people with lower income. For example, social housing or community housing.

To make market rent units affordable, rent can be subsidized through some form of financial assistance that covers some of the cost (e.g., subsidies, supplements or allowances). For example, tenants in Rent Geared to Income (RGI) units only pay a certain percentage of their monthly income on rent, such as 30 percent (the affordability standard for the core housing needs measure in the National Housing Strategy). Affordable housing providers are included in the Coordinated Access Resource Inventory if vacancies are filled through Coordinated Access.

HIFIS Service Provider definition for Affordable Housing: Affordable housing generally means a housing unit that can be owned or rented by a household with shelter costs (rent or mortgage, utilities, etc.) that are less than 30 per cent of its gross income.

At-risk and at imminent risk of homelessness

At-risk of homelessness refers to a housing situation that is precarious. For example, the housing may not meet public health and safety standards (e.g., due to overcrowding) or the tenant may not be paying rent on-time and/or may have rental arrears.

At imminent risk of homelessness refers to a housing situation that will end in the near future (e.g., within two weeks) where the household does not have the immediate prospect, means or ability of acquiring a subsequent residence.

Asylum claimant

A person who has applied for refugee-protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on their claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

Canadian citizen

Any person defined as a Canadian citizen under the former Canadian Citizenship Act and/or as a citizen under the Citizenship Act currently in force.

Canadian citizen – Canadian Born (Born in Canada)

HIFIS: A person born in Canada that holds Canadian citizenship.

Canadian citizen – Foreign Canada (Born Outside Canada)

HIFIS: A person not born in Canada who has acquired Canadian citizenship through the naturalization process.

Chronic homelessness

Refers to persistent or long-term homelessness where people have:

- Been homeless for at least 180 days at some point over the course of a year (not necessarily consecutive days); and/or,
- Recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total at least 18 months.

The measure of chronicity only includes sheltered, unsheltered and hidden homelessness. More specifically, it only includes time spent in the following living situations:

- Emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds, including those for people experiencing domestic violence);
- Unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation (e.g., parks);
- Staying temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); and,
- Short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings).

It does not include time spent in transitional housing or public institutions (e.g., hospital or corrections), although people who are discharged into homelessness from these living situations can be considered chronically homeless if they were experiencing chronic homelessness upon entry to transitional housing or a public institution.

This experience can also be further described as acute chronicity or prolonged instability:

- Acute chronicity: Homelessness for at least 180 days at some point over the course of a year (not necessarily consecutive days); and/or,
- Prolonged instability: Recurrent episodes of homelessness over three years that total at least 18 months.

Any individual may experience acute chronicity, prolonged instability or both.

Emergency shelter

Temporary, short-term accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. At minimum, emergency shelters provide overnight accommodation. Programs may also provide access to food, personal supplies, help with housing searches or support services (case management). Emergency shelter excludes motel or hotel stays that are paid for privately (e.g., with income or savings).

In the Reaching Home Housing Continuum, “Emergency Shelter” falls under the “Sheltered Homeless” category.

Programs usually aim to be low-barrier by adopting a harm reduction approach and serving people immediately if they are eligible (e.g., they have no other safe and appropriate place to stay that night). There is also usually no expectation for people to contribute financially toward their stay. That being said, some programs only serve certain population groups (e.g., youth) and referrals may come from a centralized intake team that helps to triage requests for service. In general, lengths of stay are intended to be less than three months and the goal is that people are helped to transition to some form of permanent housing at discharge.

Emergency shelters organize their bed capacity differently. Some offer shared accommodation (such as dorm-style rooms), while others offer private rooms or a mix of both. Similarly, some shelters are year-round facilities with only permanent (regular) beds, while others have overflow (temporary or seasonal) options or a mix of both.

HIFIS Service Provider definition for Emergency Shelter: Temporary, short-term accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. At minimum, emergency shelters provide overnight accommodation. Programs may also provide access to food, personal supplies, help with housing searches or support services (case

management). Emergency shelter excludes motel or hotel stays that are paid for privately (e.g., with income or savings).

National Service Provider List definition for Emergency Shelter: Temporary, short-term accommodation for people experiencing homelessness with permanent bed capacity and stays typically less than three months in duration.

Encampment / campsite

Outdoor location with a group of tents, makeshift shelters or other long-term outdoor settlement, where two or more individuals stay.

In the Reaching Home Housing Continuum, “Encampment / campsite” falls under the “Unsheltered Homeless” category.

Foreign national

A person who is not a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident.

Hidden homelessness

People experiencing homelessness that are staying:

- Temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); or,
- In short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings).

In general, hidden homelessness includes people staying somewhere temporarily because they do not have the resources to secure their own permanent housing (e.g., persons facing financial difficulties and recently evicted). These living situations are precarious and people could be asked to leave at any time.

It is acknowledged that measuring hidden homelessness is challenging. To determine who falls in the category of “hidden”, people may be asked, for example, “Are you currently living in this household temporarily because you have no where else to live?”

Under Reaching Home, hidden homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes and the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum. That being said, for Point-in-Time Counts, people experiencing hidden homelessness are not included in enumeration, just the survey.

Homelessness

The situation of an individual or family who does not have a permanent address or residence, and does not have the immediate prospect, means, and ability of acquiring it.

In general, homelessness includes people staying in unsheltered locations, in shelters or somewhere temporarily because they do not have the resources to secure their own permanent housing. People experiencing homelessness often transition between locations, as most people who sleep outside are likely to access shelter at some point.

More specifically, homeless episodes can include time spent:

- In emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds);
- In unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation (e.g., parks);

- Staying temporarily with others (e.g., family or friends) without guarantee of continued residency (“couch surfing”); or,
- In short-term rentals with no security of tenure (e.g., paying for motels with income or savings).

Homelessness prevention

An intervention that provides support to people before a crisis occurs, aiming to reduce risks and prevent homelessness. Homelessness prevention includes supporting people who are currently housed, but at-risk of losing their housing. It also includes supporting people who are being discharged from public systems (e.g., health, correctional, and child welfare) from being discharged to emergency shelter or the street (inflowing into homelessness as a result).

Immigrant or refugee shelter

Temporary accommodation specifically for refugees, refugee claimants or immigrants.

This is the National Service Provider List definition.

Internal migrant (non-newcomer)

A person who establishes residence in a new place within their own country.

PiT (non-newcomer): Individuals who self reported to have not immigrated into Canada.

Permanent resident / Immigrant

HIFIS (Permanent resident/immigrant): A permanent resident is a foreign national who has acquired permanent resident status (the right to live, work and study in Canada without any time limit on their stay) and has not subsequently lost it. An immigrant is a person who makes a conscious decision to leave their home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there.

PiT (Immigrant/permanent resident): A landed immigrant/permanent resident is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. This is self reported at time of survey.

RROL: Recent immigrants, regardless of citizenship status. In this context, it refers to individuals who arrived in Canada in the last five years.

Refugee / Refugee claimant

HIFIS (Refugee): A person who is outside of their home country or country where they normally live and fears returning to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

HIFIS (Refugee Claimant): A person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on a claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

PiT (Refugee): A person who is outside of their home country, or country where they normally live, and fears returning to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

PiT (Refugee Claimant): A person who has applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and is waiting for a decision on a claim from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

RROL (Refugee/Refugee Claimants): People who have been offered refugee protection in Canada, who fear persecution and who are unwilling or unable to return to their country of origin, and/or a person who has claimed refugee protection in Canada.

Sheltered homelessness

People experiencing homelessness that are staying in emergency shelters (permanent or overflow beds).

This includes the following types of shelter spaces:

- Shelters for all population groups;
- Shelters for specific population groups (e.g., men, women, youth or families) or situations (e.g., extreme weather or crises); and,
- Domestic Violence (DV) shelters.

People may also be staying at alternative shelter sites, such as hotels or motels, where their stays are paid for by the service provider (e.g., through a voucher or arrangement with the operator), not privately (e.g., through income or savings).

Under Reaching Home, sheltered homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes, the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum, and Point-in-Time Counts (where sheltered homelessness is part of the core methodology for the enumeration and survey).

Temporary Resident Visa (visitor visa)

A Temporary Resident Visa, also referred to as a visitor visa, is an official document issued by a Canadian visa office that is placed in a foreign national’s passport to show that they have met the requirements for admission to Canada as a temporary resident (either as a visitor, a student, or a worker).

HIFIS (visitor visa): Issued to people coming to Canada for a limited time and for specific reasons not related to employment.

Undeclared

HIFIS: Citizenship/immigration status is unknown.

Undocumented migrant

A foreign national who enters or stays in a country without the appropriate documentation.

Unsheltered homelessness

People experiencing homelessness that are staying in unsheltered locations or places not intended for human habitation.

For example, streets, alleys, parks and other public locations, transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles, ravines and other outdoor locations.

Under Reaching Home, unsheltered homelessness is considered as “homeless” in the federal standard for measuring community-level outcomes, the HIFIS Reaching Home Housing Continuum, and Point-in-Time Counts (where unsheltered homelessness is part of the core methodology for the enumeration and survey).

Visible homelessness

Visible homelessness refers to staying in unsheltered locations or shelters.

Work permit (work visa)

A document issued by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada that authorizes a foreign national to work legally in Canada.

HIFIS (work visa): Issued to people coming to Canada for a limited time and for specific reasons related to employment.