

OLDER IMMIGRANTS AND HOUSING IN MONTREAL

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants

The project **Learning from the Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants** focuses on the required strategies to fight against social exclusion faced by immigrant older adults. It aims to bring together stakeholders from institutional, public and community-based networks serving immigrant older adults, to discuss their realities and potential solutions to the issues facing them, in different Canadian cities (Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and Quebec City).

Led by **Shari Brotman** (McGill University, Montreal), this project involves four other co-researchers who were responsible for local teams: **Sharon Koehn** (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver), **Ilyan Ferrer** (University of Calgary, Calgary), **Émilie Raymond** (Université Laval, Quebec) et **Pam Orzeck** (McGill University, Montreal). Our team, based out of McGill's School of Social Work, is built around a partnership between the university and the community, involving an advisory group made up of community-based organizations, services providers and decisions makers. We have worked in collaboration with a diversity of immigrant and ethnocultural groups, in 7 different languages, to reach immigrant older adults who are underrepresented in the health and social services system, in public policy and research.

A RESEARCH PROJECT USING THE INTERSECTIONAL LIFECOURSE PERSPECTIVE

This project follows up on the study named Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: A narrative-photovoice study. The initial data collection focused on the lifecourse histories of immigrant older adults and was conducted between 2014-2017, in Vancouver and Montreal. The research design integrated a narrative approach and the photovoice method with the aim of exploring how the immigration process influences the life course of older adults. The results of this study were showcased in a traveling photo exhibition, summarizing the life histories and experiences of 19 immigrant older adults who came from Afghanistan, Chili, Colombia, Guyana, Korea, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Philippines and Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the main goals of the project is to contribute to efforts to increase our ability – as researchers, practitioners and activists– to work together to fight discrimination and social exclusion affecting immigrant older adults, by strategizing about actions necessary to adapt programs and policies to better meet the needs, and address the realities of diverse older adult immigrants, their families and communities

ROUNDTABLE

This policy brief draws from the discussions from a meeting held on **October 16th, 2019**, at 7000 avenue du Parc, in Montreal.

This round table centered on the main theme of housing and immigrant older adults and had over 62 participants. At each table, between 8 and 12 participants that represented different organizations and one facilitator talked for close to two hours.

The main themes which emerged in table discussions were presented during a plenary session which was held at the end of the day's events. The content analysis of these discussions was the basis for the development of this policy brief.



1. STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants

SOCIOECONOMICAL CONDITIONS

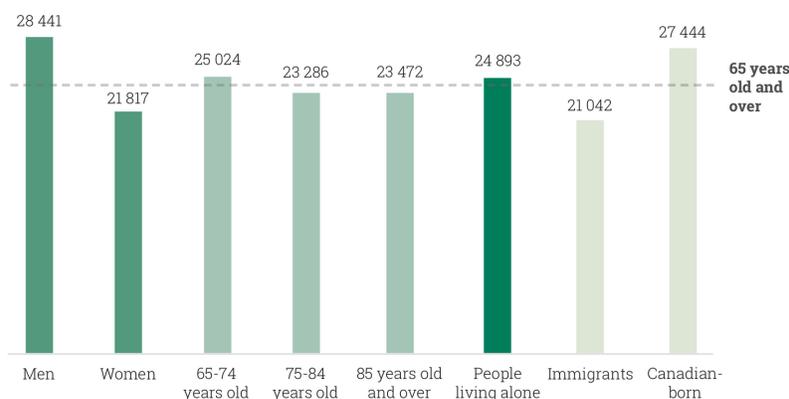
On the Island of Montreal, **44%** of persons aged 65 and over were born outside of Canada, which represents close to 130 000 people. **96%** of them arrived in the country before 2006. Finally, **4%** of immigrant older adults, or 5600 people, arrived after 2006 (DRSP, 2019a).

65% of the immigrant older adults who arrived in Canada since 2006 came through the family sponsorship program, over 16% came as refugees and close to 12% were part of economic immigration (ibid.).

As the graph below highlights, Montreal-based immigrant older adults have a lower median annual income (\$21 042) than seniors who were born in Canada (\$27 444). 15% of immigrant older adults live under the low-income cut-off in Montreal (DRSP, 2019b), which is set at a net income \$28 410 per year for a household of two individuals and at a net income of \$20 386 per year for one person. Furthermore, immigrant older adults in Montreal (74,4%) are more likely to need the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) than seniors who were born in Canada (32%).

Median annual income, seniors 65 years and older, after tax (\$)

Montréal, 2016 Census



HOUSING

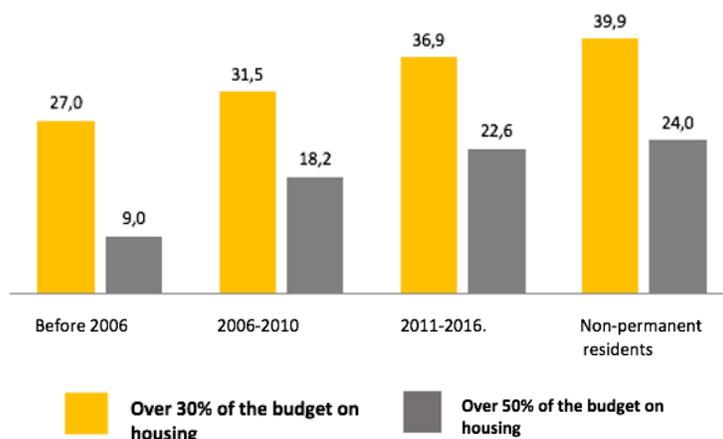
In Montreal, 27% of immigrant older adults live alone. The proportion of immigrant older adults living alone decreases to 10% among people who have immigrated after 2006.

27% of immigrant older adults living in Montreal spend over 30% of their gross income on housing costs and must therefore may be subject to financial precarity.

The later the immigration date, the more likely immigrant older adults will experience situations of housing precarity.

For example, immigrants who are 65 years old and above are more likely to be renters and to spend an important part of their budget on housing if they have arrived in Canada after 2006

Proportion (%) of the population aged 65 and over spending 30% or 50% of their income on housing, depending on the period of immigration, Montreal, 2016



Finally, older persons who have immigrated before 2006 are more likely to be owners (66%) than those who have arrived after 2006, especially for non-permanent residents, who have the lowest rate of home ownership (40,7%) among the different sub-groups of immigrant older adults.

2. ISSUES AND REALITIES - PART I

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants

Intersectional analysis and the lifecourse perspective

A critical perspective that considers the ways in which the interactions of individuals with social structures, public policy, institutions, state services and programs shape the lifecourse trajectories and experiences of older adults.

These realities can stem from multiple and intersectional social dimensions that can accumulate and change along individual life course trajectories, based on the multiple positions of individuals and groups in relation to various factors, including: social class, gender, migration journey and immigration status, sexual orientation, ethnocultural identity and ability.

EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIOECONOMICAL CONDITIONS

- Poverty and socio-economic challenges.
- Social isolation.
- Employment discrimination.
- Overrepresentation of immigrants in secondary labour markets.
- Difficulty accessing public pension provisions, especially for immigrant older adults who were sponsored, thus reducing their social and residential mobility.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

- Poor access to social programs (i.e. tax credits, government pensions) and health care, especially for immigrant older adults who were sponsored, refugees or those who have recently arrived in the country.
- Lower French language acquisition, especially for women, because of the difficulty in accessing language courses.
- Dependence on others, notably family members, for translation and interpretation (linguistic as well as cultural), especially when interacting with institutions, social programs, landlords and other social actors.
- Immigrant older adults do not typically appear on the priority lists of service provider and housing rights organizations.

When we ask immigrant older adults to fight an eviction or unsanitary living conditions with their landlords, we must also consider their immigration pathway. Opposing the government could be very hard to do for someone coming from a country where there is war or political conflict.

Excerpt from the round table



Language can also act as a barrier for an immigrant wishing to live outside of Montreal because the majority of networks and services outside of Montreal are francophone

Excerpt from the round table

2. ISSUES AND REALITIES - PART II

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HOUSING RIGHTS AND GENTRIFICATION

- Gentrification has a direct effect on the ability of immigrant older adults to age in place, through abusive rent increases, evictions (legal or not) and harassment. The supply of affordable housing has reduced rapidly in Parc-Extension, for example, with condominiums conversions contributing to the removal of rental apartments from the housing market.
- Commercial transformations associated with gentrification also impact the ability of immigrant older adults to socialize and, for example, to meet their dietary needs.
- There is a gap in knowledge regarding housing rights, leaving immigrant older adults vulnerable to exploitation in the private rental housing market, especially if they live alone.
- Individuals reported fearing reprisals should they assert their rights against their landlord.
- Many public and community-based organizations are not skilled to work with this population and lack the funds to do so.
- Individual owners, notably in Montreal-Nord, struggle to follow the municipal tax increases, which are partly indexed to market values.

The complaint process is long for immigrant older adults. Reaching out to resources requires assistance. The older adults must be accompanied by someone who can make sure to follow-up.

Excerpt from the roundtable

HOUSING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL HOUSING

- Shortage of social housing units offering sufficient space for multigenerational households. Restrictions regarding the number of people and the type of intergenerational households can limit older immigrants' ability to access social housing.
- Dependence on inter and multigenerational relationships and cohabitation for survival (financial, cultural, and social).
- There are not enough spaces in social housing units, housing cooperatives and housing non-profit organizations (NPOs) for immigrant older adults that want spend a lesser part of their income on housing.



3. WAYS FORWARD

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants

The city must adopt an intersectional approach (food services, public transit, to create a neighborhood life/social life) to offer a decent life to immigrant older adults

Excerpt from the roundtable

FEDERAL LEVEL

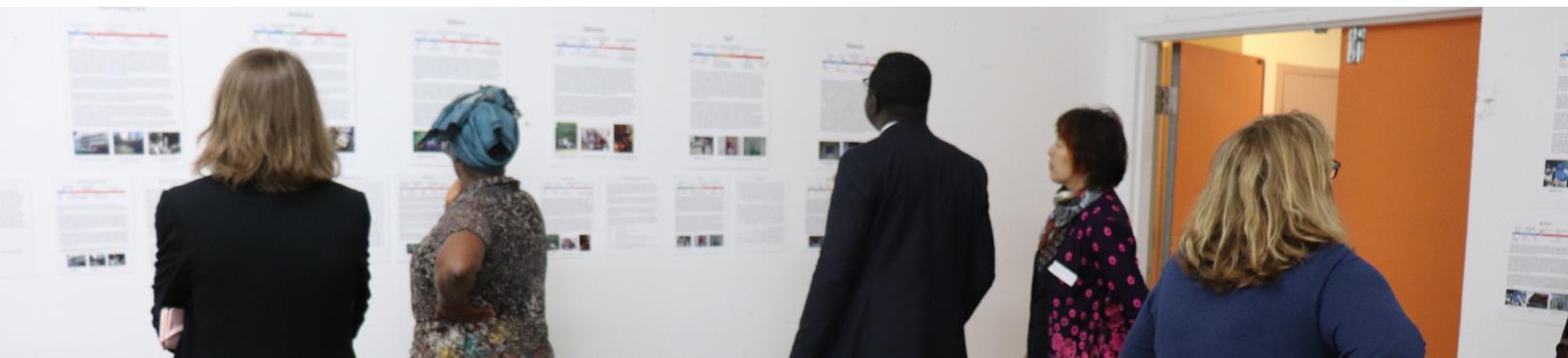
- Acknowledge that the median income of immigrant older adults is not sufficient to house oneself in Montreal and other major Canadian cities.
- Reform immigration policies to reduce vulnerability and potential exposure to elder abuse among sponsored older adult immigrants who are overly dependent on family members for their survival.
- Reduce the waiting period to access rent-controlled housing and other forms of social and cooperative housing, in particular for sponsored immigrant older adults and those with a temporary status.
- Significantly and promptly improve the social housing offerings which specifically target immigrant older adults.

PROVINCIAL LEVEL

- Raise awareness among immigrant older adults about their rights and the rules that protect them from abuse by landlords (for example, article 1959.1 of the Civil Code).
- Improve support services for immigrant older adults with the Tribunal Administratif du Logement (TAL).
- Increase the services offered by the Banque interrégionale d'interprètes (BII) to better serve immigrant older adults.

MUNICIPAL LEVEL

- The City must adopt policies to control the effects of gentrification, particularly in neighborhoods where high proportions of immigrant older adults reside, such as Parc-Extension.
- Municipal public servants and other employees must receive adequate training regarding the issues facing immigrant older adults in Montreal. More interpreters must be made available within services offered by the City, in particularly during housing inspections.
- The City must facilitate the adaptation of housing units for immigrant older adults who live with disabilities in order to maintain their capacity to age in place.



4. CONTACT

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants



MONTREAL TEAM - HOUSING ROUNDTABLE

Shari Brotman (McGill School of Social Work) – principal investigator, organisation

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PARTNERS

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NATIONAL TEAM

Shari Brotman (McGill University, Montréal)

Sharon Koehn (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver)

Ilyan Ferrer (University of Calgary, Calgary)

Émilie Raymond (Université Laval, Québec)

Pam Orzeck (McGill University, Montréal)

LINKS

Website of the project

Statistical portraits from the DRSP and the TCAIM

[Portrait des aînés de l'Île de Montréal](#)

DRSP, 2017

[Living conditions of immigrant seniors](#)

DRSP and TCAIM, 2019

[Seniors' income](#)

DRSP and TCAIM, 2019

For any questions or inquiries, contact Julien Simard, coordinator

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