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# Cornerstone or Weak Link? The Housing Situation of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montreal

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English versions of tables  
and figures published in  
*Pierre angulaire ou maillon  
faible? Le logement des  
réfugiés, demandeurs d'asile  
et immigrants à Montréal.*

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([http://im.metropolis.net/research-policy/research\\_content/doc/SPLI\\_Rapport-finaloct2011.pdf](http://im.metropolis.net/research-policy/research_content/doc/SPLI_Rapport-finaloct2011.pdf))

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY :

### *Cornerstone or Weak Link? The Housing Situation of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montréal*

This report is part of a pan-Canadian research project, « *Precarious Housing and Hidden Homelessness among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver* », stemming from a proposal call from the Homelessness Partnerships Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, in collaboration with the National Secretariat of the Metropolis Project.

The housing situation of newcomers is a more worrying issue today than it was about 15 years ago. For a good number of newcomers, economic integration has become more of a challenge, while at the same time housing markets have become much tighter and more expensive in Canada's major cities including Montréal. Montréal is also beset by a shortage of affordable rental housing suitable for families with children. This study zoomed in on two target groups of newcomers: refugees selected overseas before their departure for Canada; and people who file a refugee claim once they arrive in Canada. These two groups are thought to experience greater housing vulnerabilities than those in the economic immigrant or family classes, but comparative research is lacking.

We obtained primary source data through a major study carried out in partnership with several community organizations in the settlement services sector, located in different parts of Montréal and suburbs. We first met with specialized informants from these organizations so as to obtain their viewpoint on housing issues. Next, a questionnaire survey was carried out with 201 newcomers and immigrants with between 3 months and 10 years' residency in Canada. The respondents were drawn from the clientele of the agencies, specifically those who visited the agency for consultation, service or activity in a 4-week period in Nov.-Dec. 2010. Of these respondents, 57 had claimed refugee status in Canada (including many still awaiting the decision and some successful claimants), 47 were refugees selected outside Canada (mostly government-assisted refugees), while the vast majority of the other 97 survey participants were economic immigrants. We then conducted 6 focus groups with 37 people drawn from the two target groups, namely refugees selected outside Canada and refugee claimants.

On several indicators, including satisfaction with current housing, the housing situation and experience of economic immigrants (despite being poorer than economic immigrants in general due to the sampling frame), is better than for the other two groups. The study reveals high levels of several of the types of housing vulnerability associated with "hidden homelessness", with some of these varying between the different sub-groups. Due to their larger families, the government-assisted refugees have more often experienced overcrowded conditions. A large majority of both of the refugee sub-groups are currently exposed to extreme housing precariousness because they spend over 50% of their very low incomes on shelter costs. Over a quarter of respondents have lived in unfit housing (mould, infestations...), a finding that underlines that Montréal faces a serious problem of under-maintenance by landlords in the post-war (1946-1970) rental stock of walk-up apartments. Refugee claimants are the most vulnerable to this because of the lack of assistance and accompaniment available to them in their search for decent housing, and because of their precarious legal status. Finally, we find a troublingly high frequency of obstacles in housing access attributable to one or more forms of discrimination (income source, origin, legal status...), even among the economic immigrants in our sample.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations based mainly on discussions between the research team and the settlement organization workers on our advisory committee and aimed at all three levels of government.

## CHAPTER 1 : NEW IMMIGRANTS IN MONTREAL AND THEIR HOUSING SITUATION

*Table 1.1 Immigrants admitted to Québec, by detailed category, 2005-2009*

Admission of permanent residents, 2005-2009	N	%
Economic immigration	144 200	63.3
Family reunification	50 032	22.0
Government-assisted refugees	9 085	4.0
Privately-sponsored refugees	1 963	0.9
Refugee protection claimants recognized from within Canada	12 552	5.5
Family members of a refugee protection claimant recognized from within Canada	5 181	2.3
Other refugees	1	0.0
Other immigrants (non-recognized refugee and humanitarian claimants)	4867	2.1

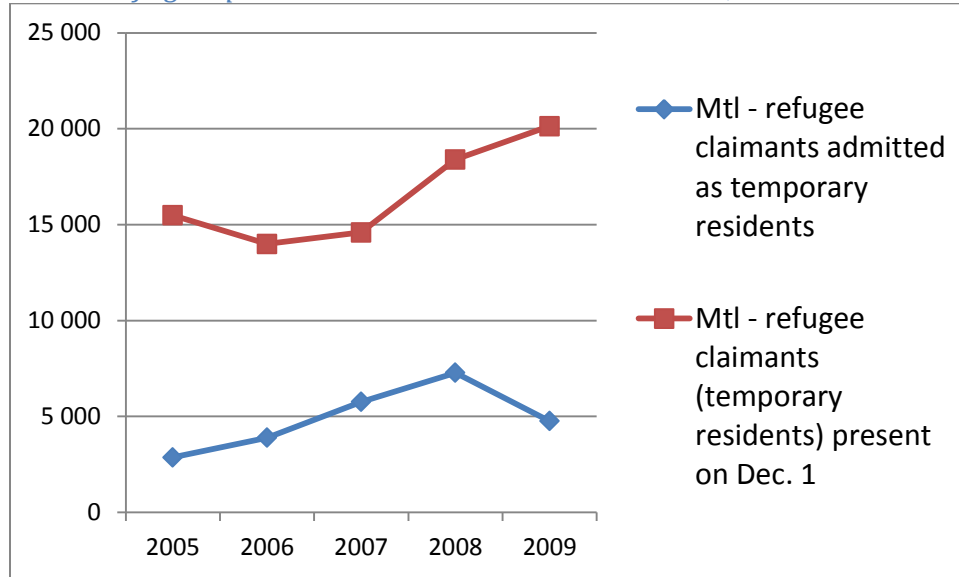
(Source : Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles du Québec, 2010, Tableau 3a; 2009 data are provisional)

*Table 1.2 Permanent residents admitted, Montréal Metropolitan Region, 2005-2009*

	Economic immigrants	Family reunification	Refugees	Other immigrants	Total
Africa and Middle-East	40%	34%	30%	33%	37%
Asia and Pacific	14%	28%	27%	21%	18%
South and Central America	14%	19%	35%	28%	18%
United States	1%	4%	2%	4%	2%
Europe and Great Britain	31%	14%	5%	13%	24%
Total (%)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total (N)	128 610	37 081	20 233	9747	195 673

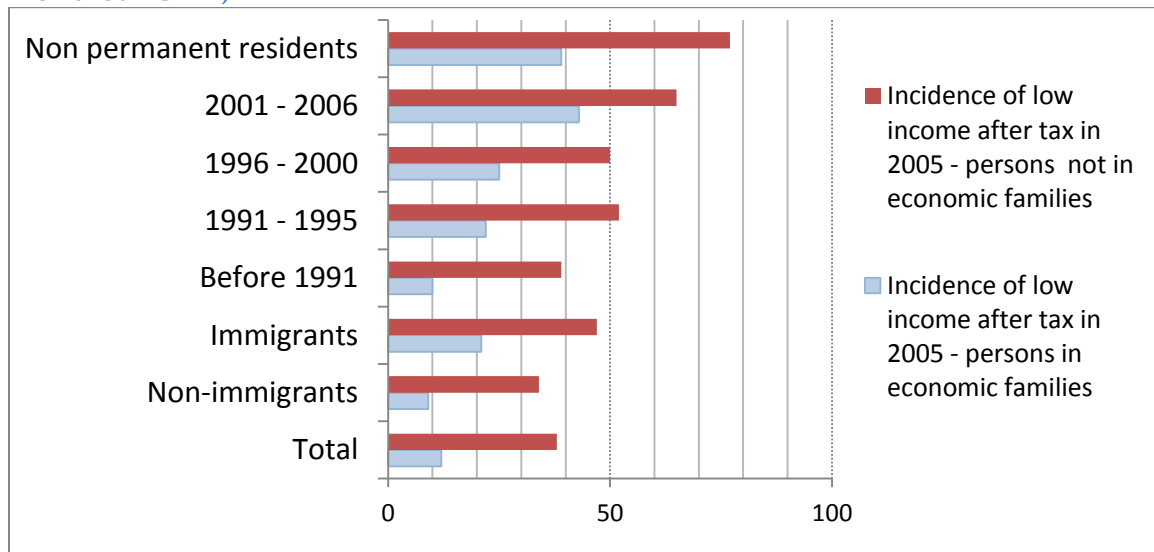
(Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010, *Facts et Figures, 2009. Digital Library*, Table tab290n\_24462. Authors' calculations.)

*Figure 1.1 : Refugee protection claimants in Montréal, 2005-2009*



(Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010, Facts and Figures)

*Figure 1.2: Incidence of low income in 2005 by immigration status, Montréal CMA, 2006*



(Source : Statistics Canada, 2006 census, Table 97-564-XCB2006008)

*Figure 1.3: Number of recent immigrants by place of birth and incidence of low income, Montréal CMA, 2006*

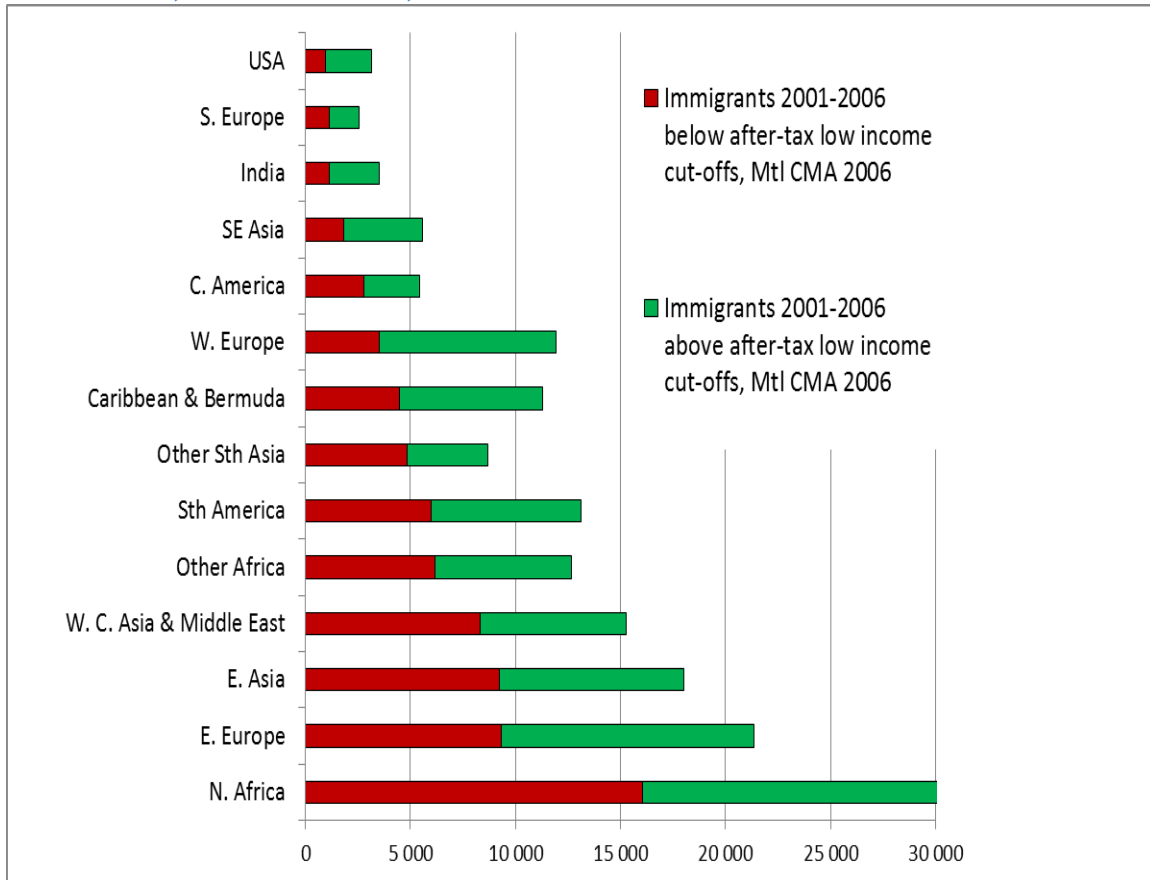
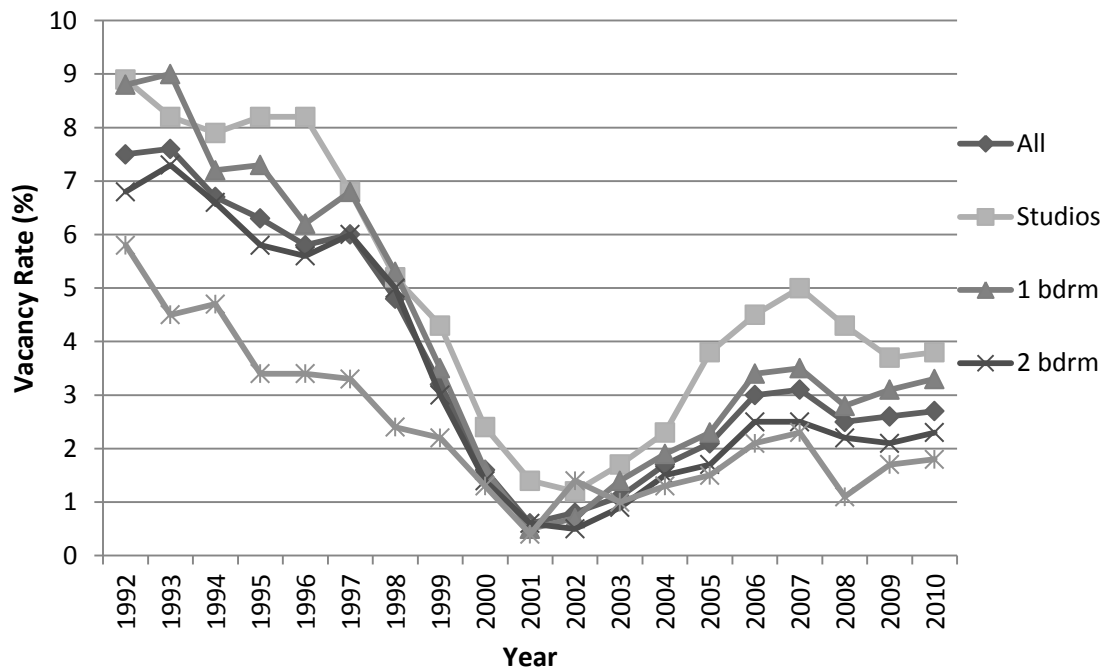




Figure 1.4: Vacancy rate of rental housing units, Island of Montréal, 1992-2010



(Source: CMHC data, Rental Housing Market Survey)

Table 1.3: Incidence of shelter-cost-to-income ratio of 50% or more, Montréal CMA, 2001 and 2006

Status of household maintainer	Renter		Owner	
	2001	2006	2001	2006
Canadian by birth	16.8	1.2	5.5	5.3
Immigrated 5 to 10 years ago	18.7	18.5	13.4	15.6
Immigrated less than 5 years ago	27.8	29.6	15.7	19.9

(Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of 2001 and 2006, special compilations provided to Metropolis Project researchers. Authors' calculations.)

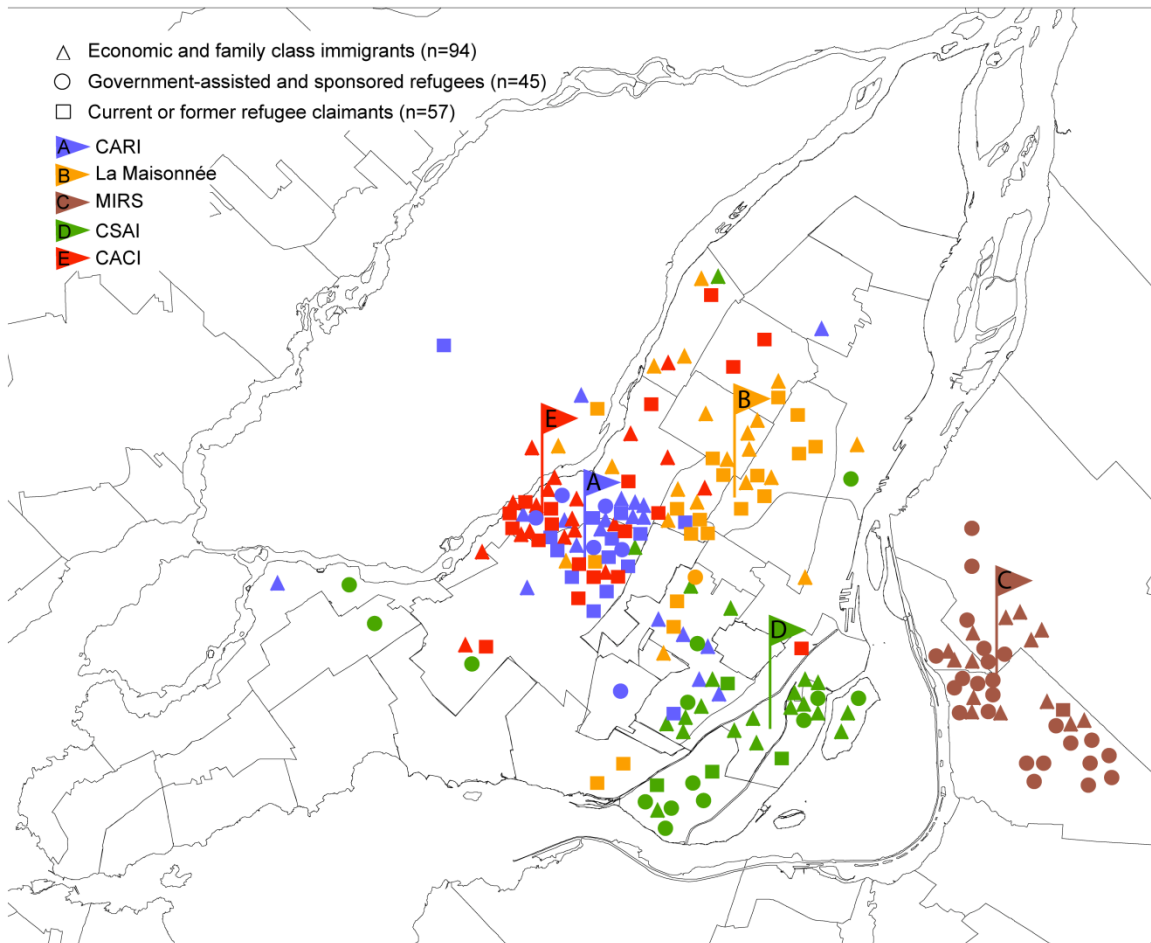
## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

*Table 2.1: The five organizations involved in the survey*

Organization (with hyper-link to their website)	Location
<a href="#">CARI St-Laurent</a> – Centre d’accueil et de référence sociale et économique pour immigrants (Welcome and Social and Economic Referral Centre for Immigrants)	City of Montréal, Saint-Laurent Borough (Grenet neighbourhood, formerly Norgate)
<a href="#">CACI</a> – Centre d’appui aux communautés immigrantes (Support Centre for immigrant communities)	City of Montréal, Ahuntsic-Cartierville Borough (Cartierville neighbourhood)
<a href="#">CSAI</a> – Centre social d’aide aux immigrants (Centre for social assistance to immigrants)	City of Montréal, South-West Borough (Côte-Saint-Paul neighbourhood)
<a href="#">La Maisonnée</a> – Service d’aide et de liaison pour immigrants (Assistance and liaison service for immigrants)	City of Montréal, Rosemont-Petite-Patrie Borough (Père-Marquette neighbourhood)
<a href="#">La MIRS</a> – Maison internationale de la Rive-Sud (The South Shore International House)	City of Brossard

Note: English translations of organization names are unofficial.

*Figure 2.1: Location of survey respondents, by postal code forward sortation area, by organization and admission status upon arrival in Canada*



*Figure 2.2: Number of immigrants with less than five years' residence in Canada, by forward sortation area, Montréal Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), 2006*

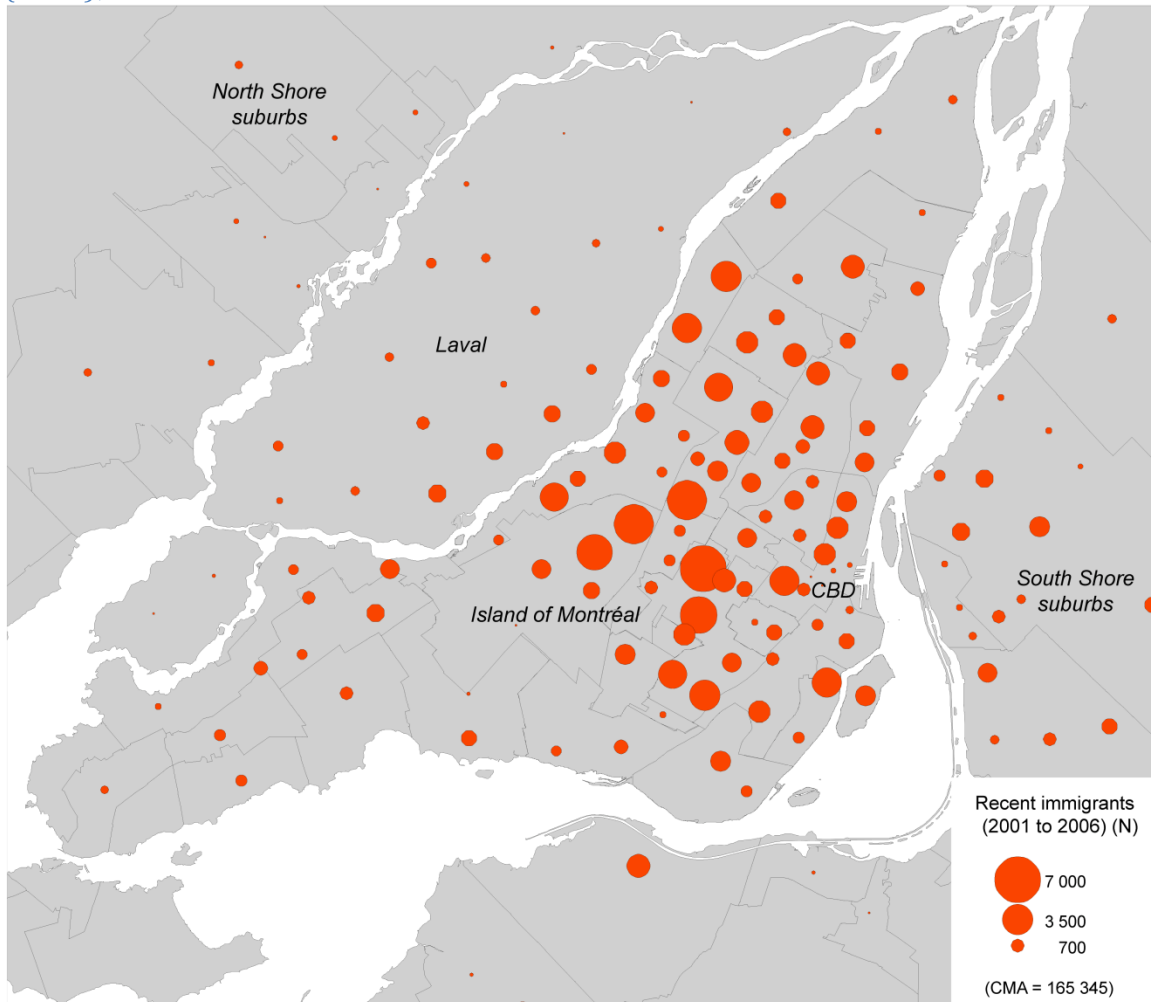
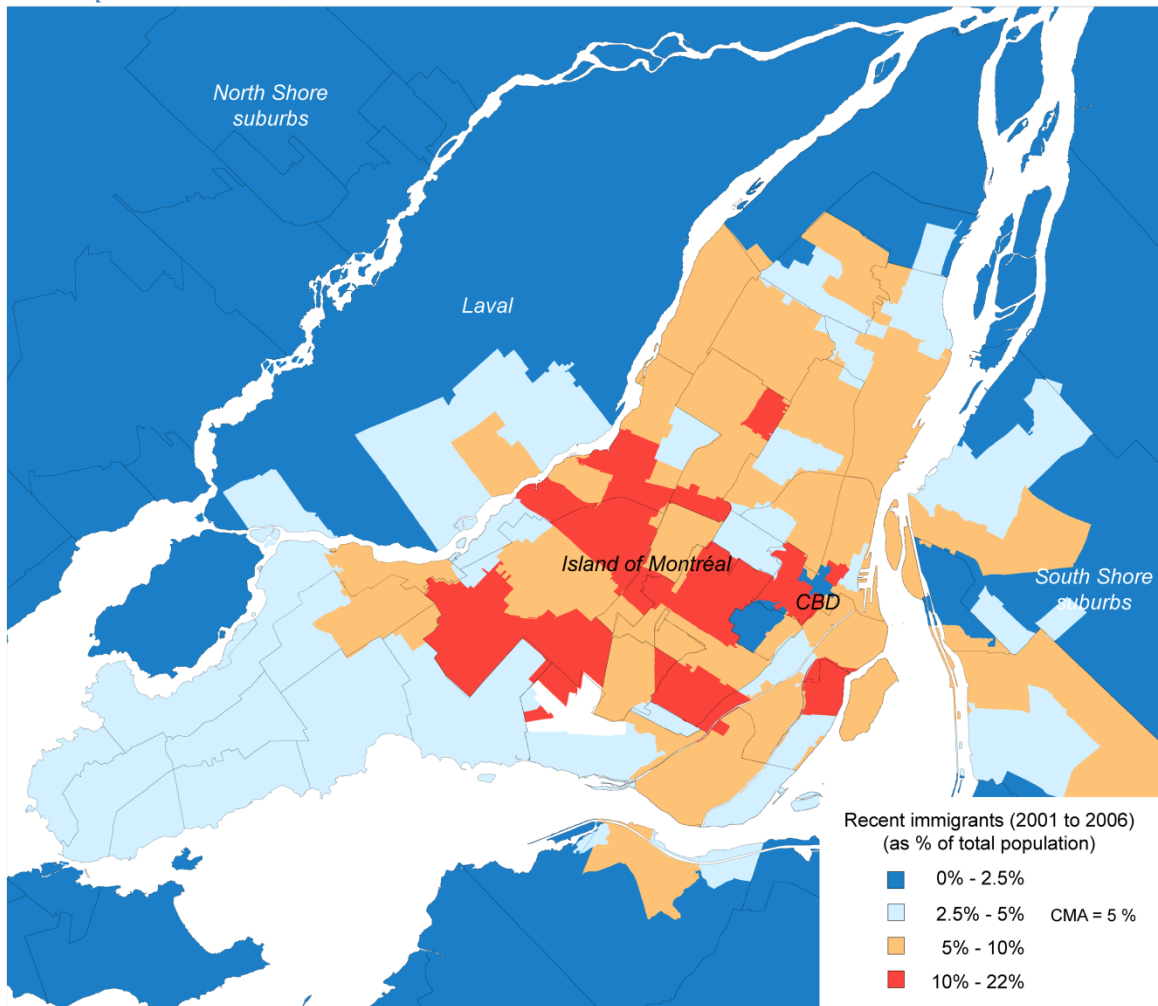
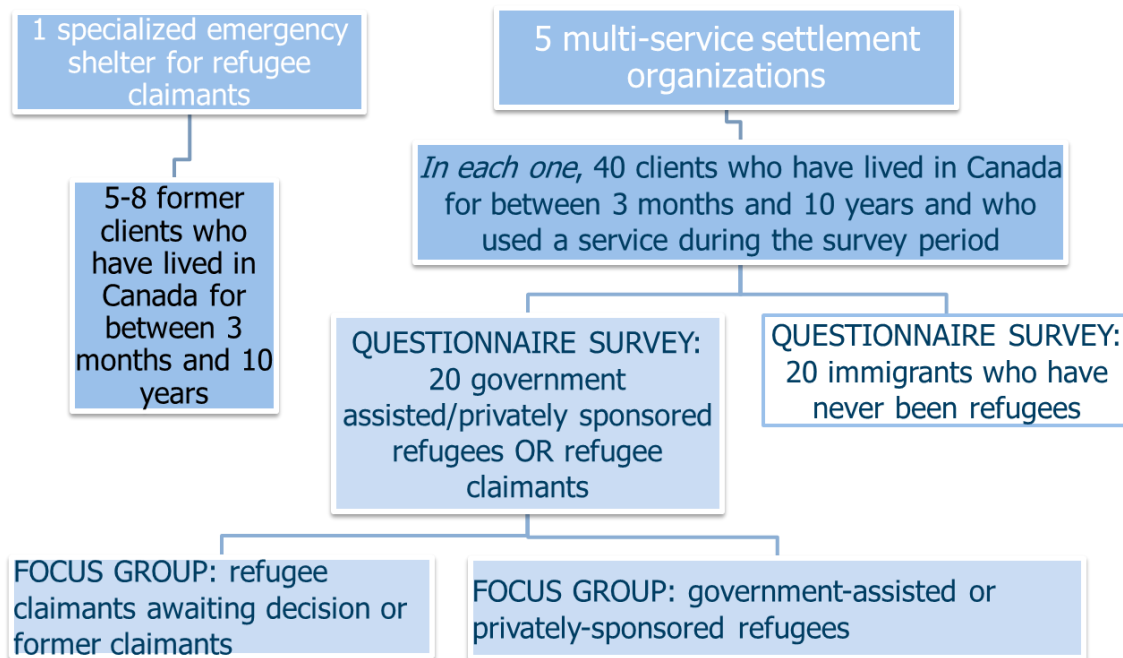


Figure 2.3: Immigrants with less than five years' residence in Canada, as a percentage of the total population, by forward sortation area, Montréal Metropolitan Area, 2006.

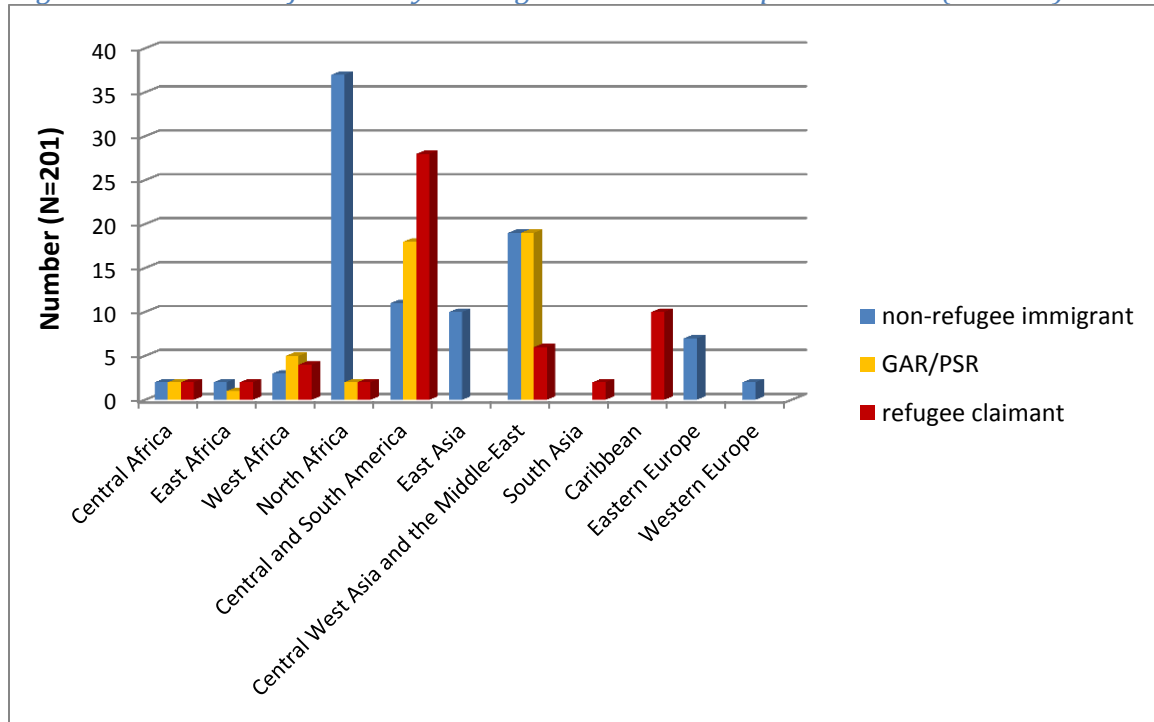


*Figure 2.4: Protocol for survey of clients of immigrant settlement organizations*



## CHAPTER 3: PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

*Figure 3.1: Place of birth by immigration status upon arrival (N=201)*



*Figure 3.2: Length of residence in Canada by immigration status upon arrival (N=201)*

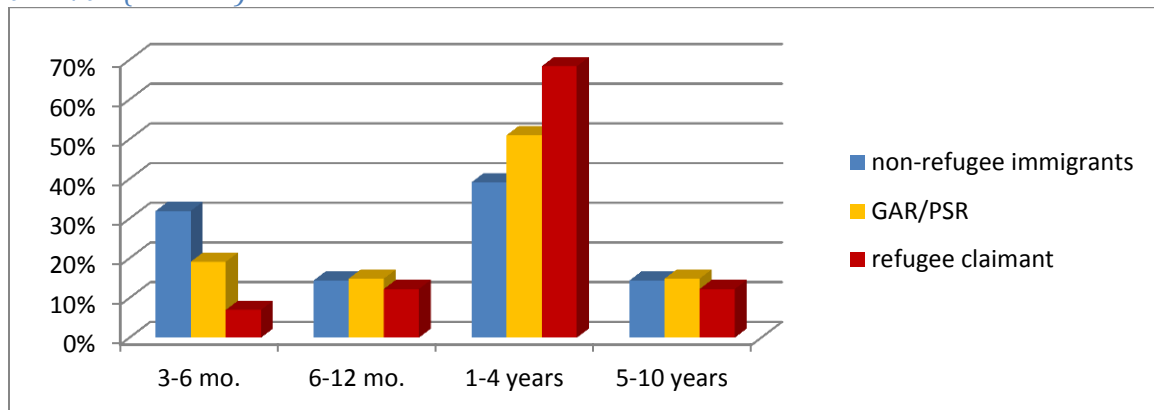


Figure 3.3: Age groups by immigration status upon arrival (N=201)

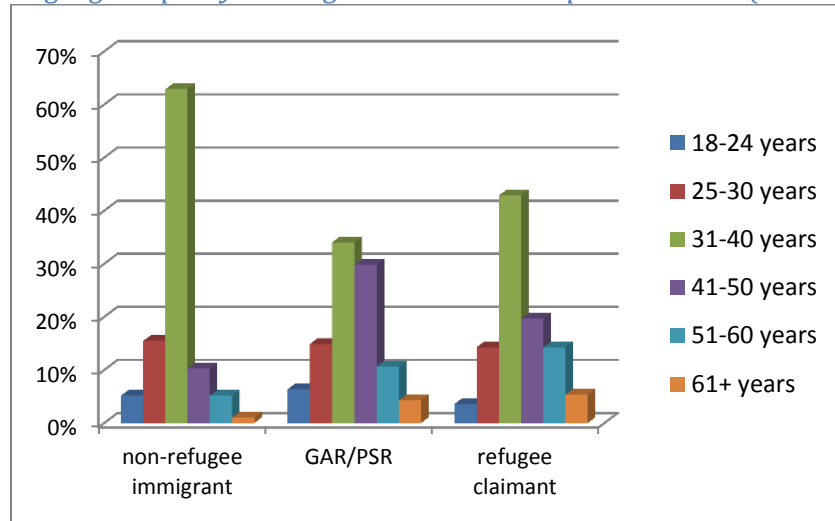


Figure 3.4: Number of children under 18 years old, by immigration status upon arrival (N=179)

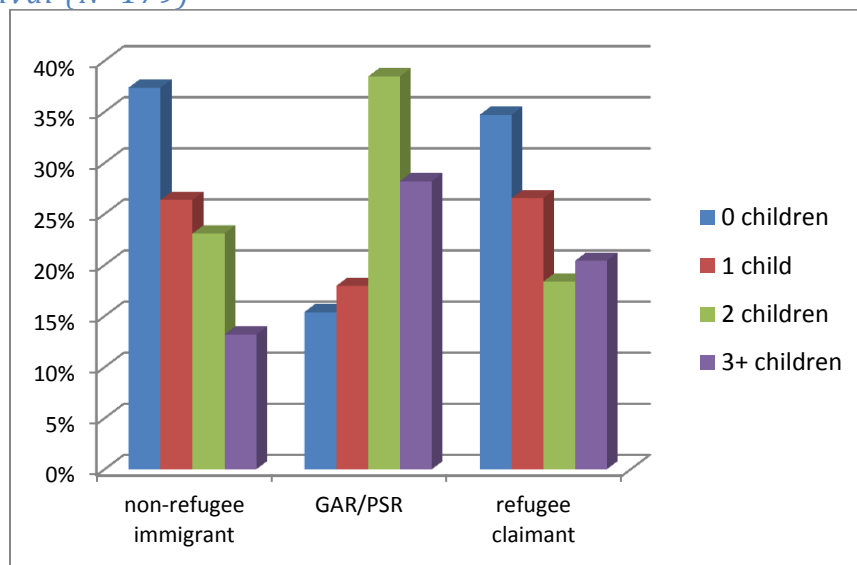




Figure 3.5: Household type, by immigration status upon arrival (N=199)

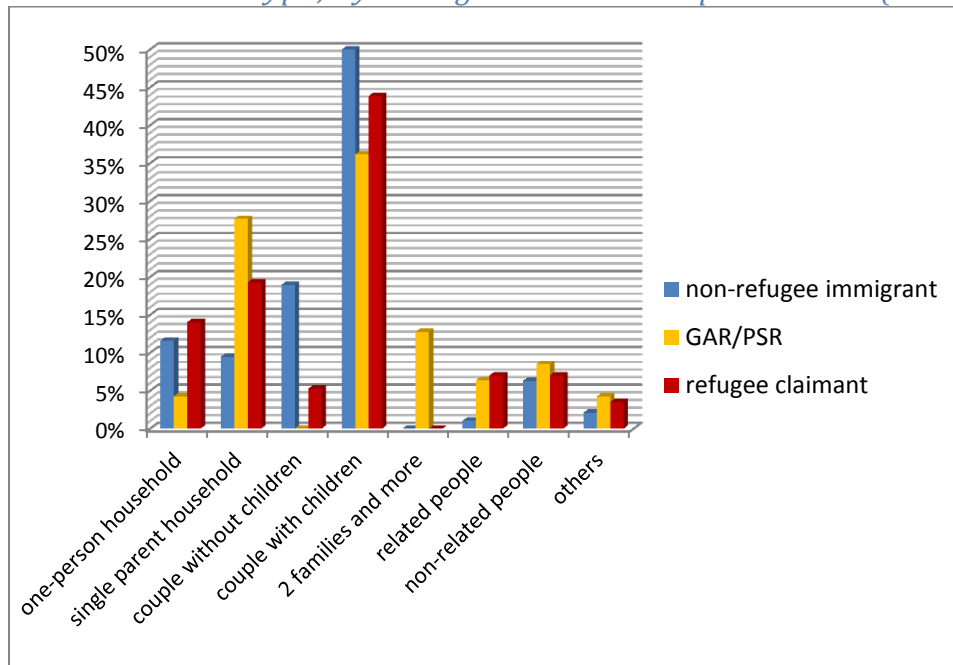


Figure 3.6: Number of adults per household, by immigration status upon arrival (N=200)

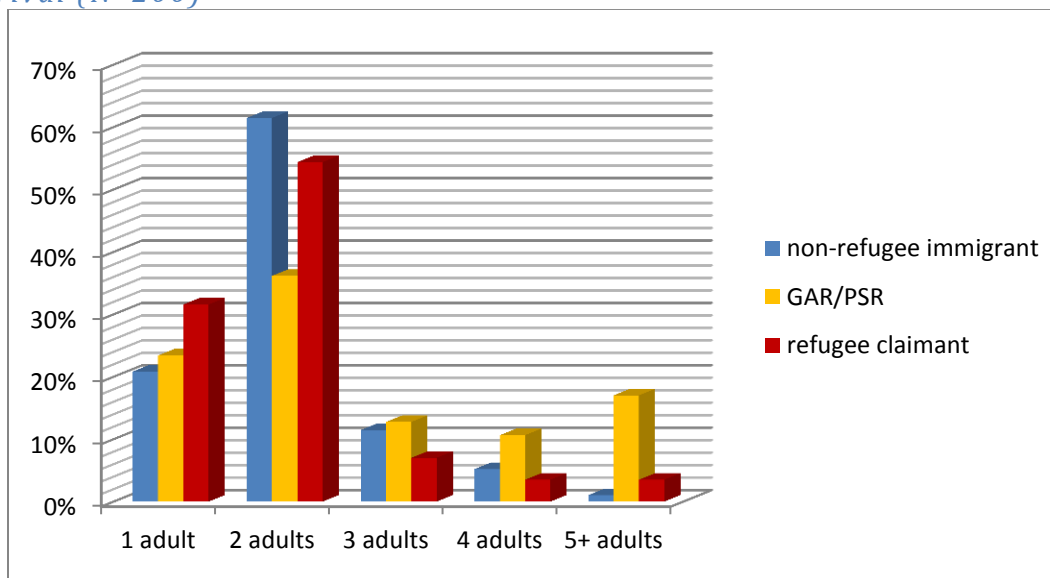


Figure 3.7: Total number of persons per household, by immigration status upon arrival (N=179)

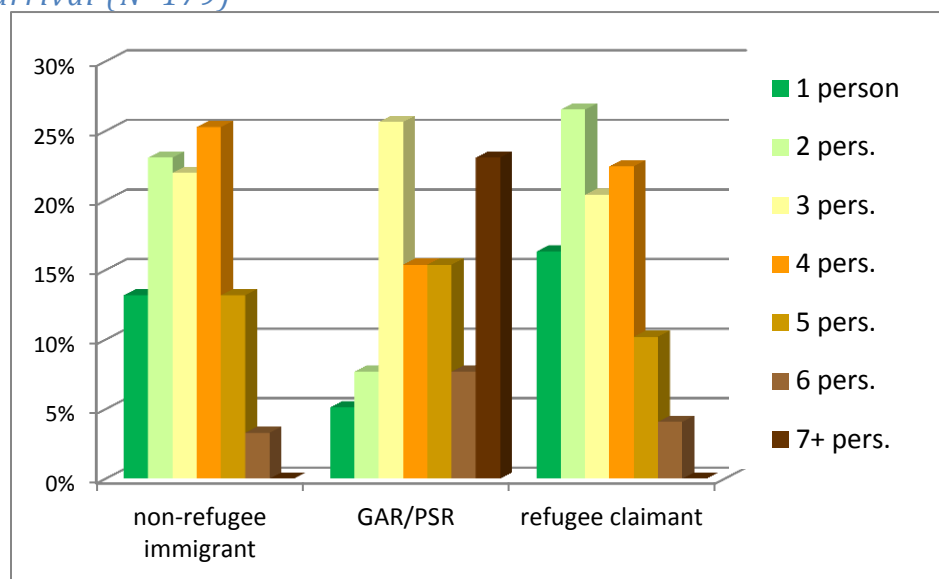
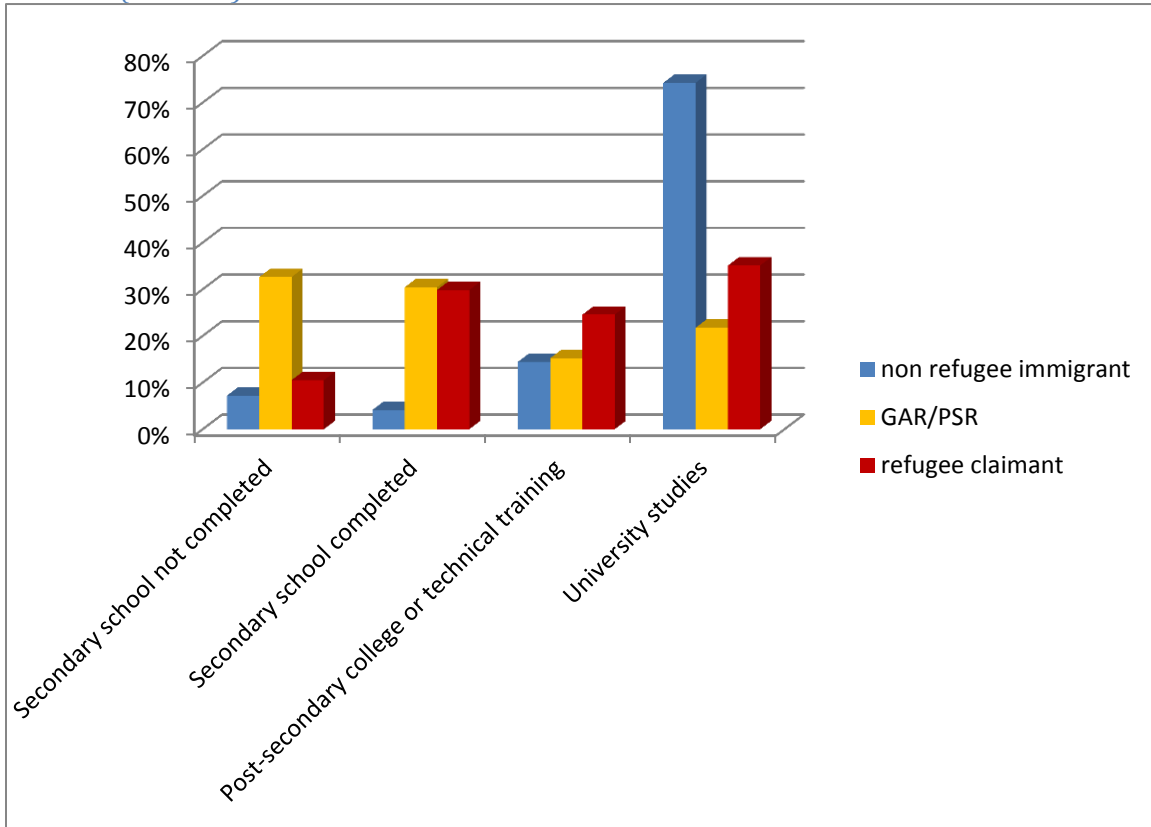


Table 3.1: Knowledge of spoken French, by immigration status upon arrival (N=182)

	Non refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
It is easy for me to keep up a conversation in French	69.2%	36.6%	5.0%	57.7%
I need help to converse in French	28.6%	58.5%	50.0%	42.3%
Total	100% (n=91)	100% (n=41)	100% (n=54)	100% (N=182)

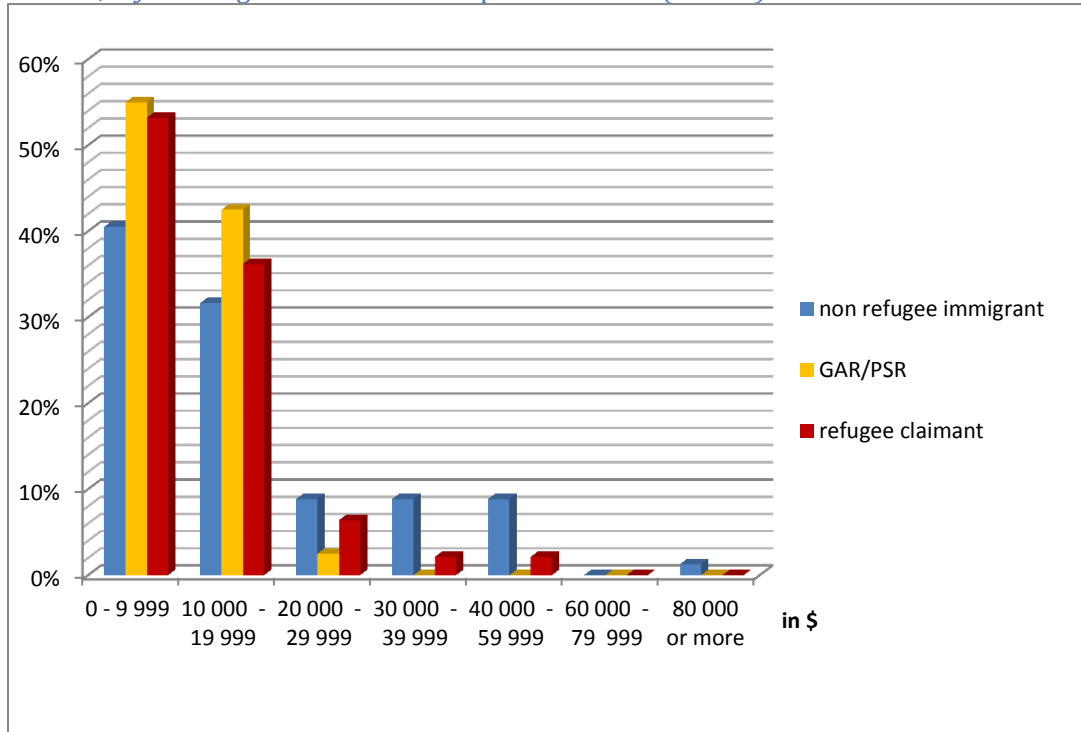
*Figure 3.8: Highest level of education attained, by immigration status upon arrival (N=200)*



*Table 3.2: Annual household income in 2009 or 2010, without regard to immigration status upon arrival (N=166)*

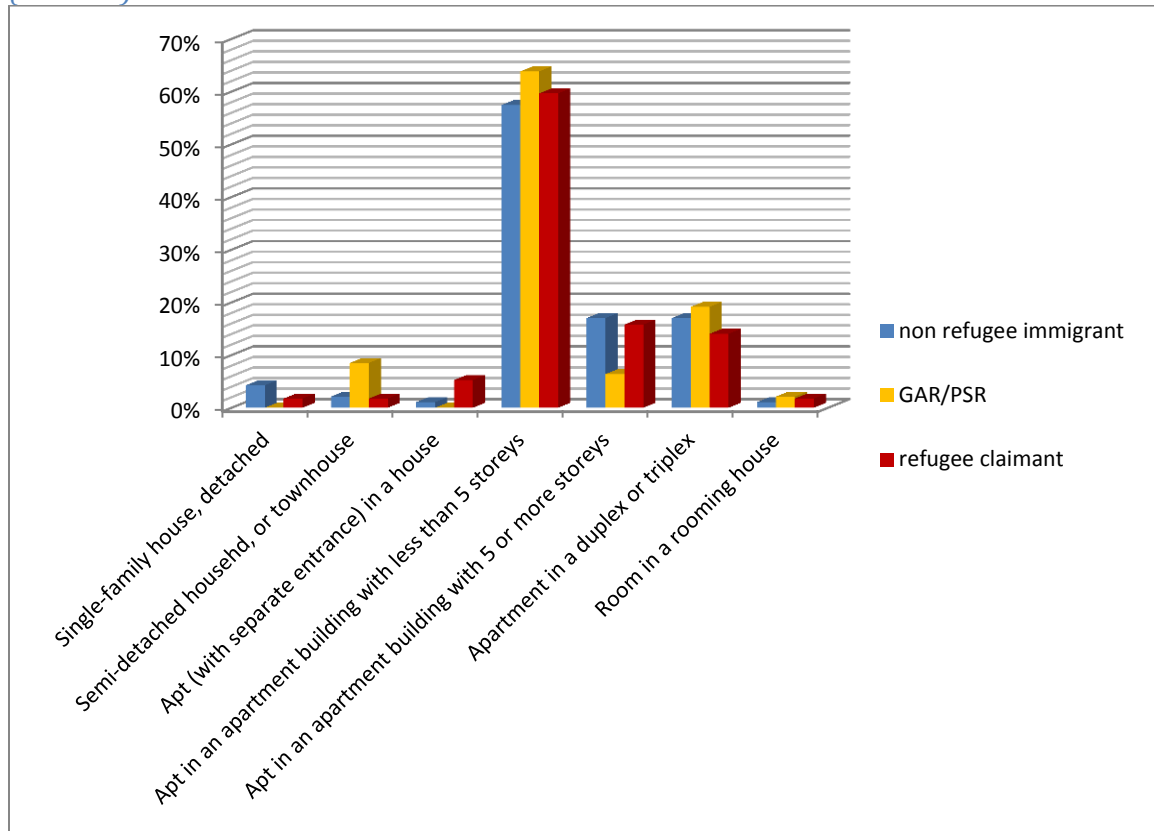
Annual household income	Percentage of respondents
\$0 - \$9 999	47.6%
\$10 000 - \$19 999	35.5%
\$20 000 - \$29 999	6.6%
\$30 000 - \$39 999	4.8%
\$40 000 - \$59 999	4.8%
\$60 000 - \$79 999	0.0%

*Figure 3.9: Average annual income in 2009 or 2010 of couples with children, by immigration status upon arrival (N=71)*

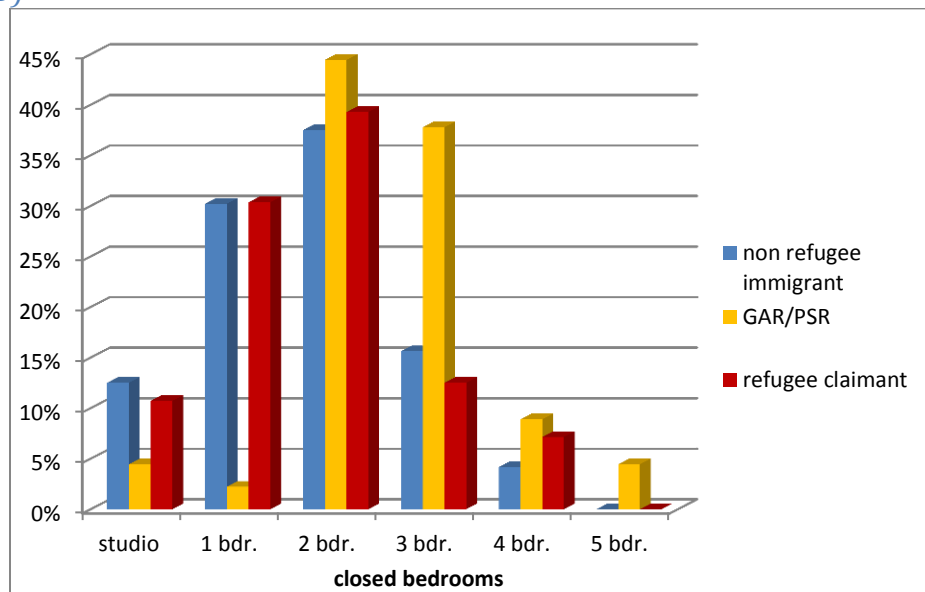


## CHAPTER FOUR: RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE AND HOUSING CONDITIONS

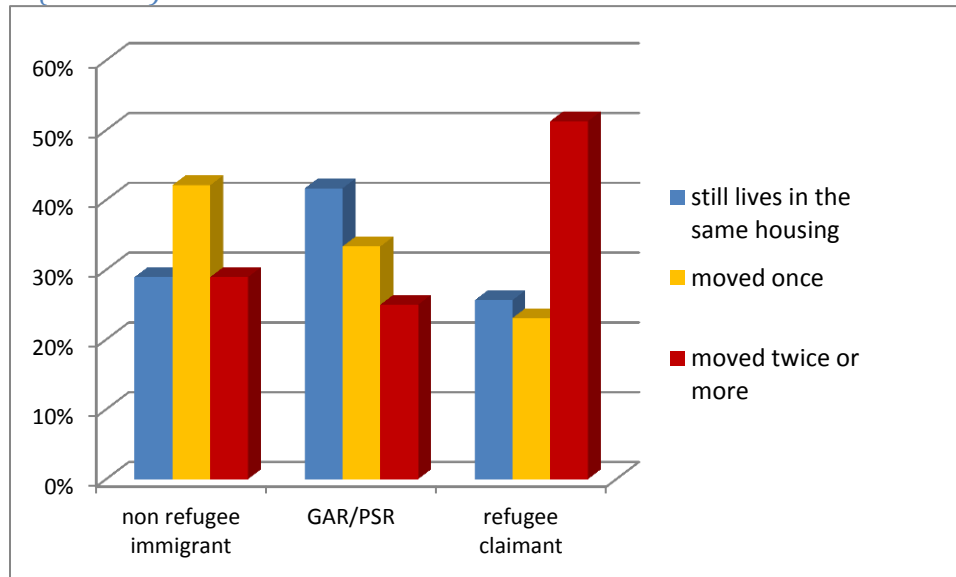
*Figure 4.1: Current housing type, by immigration status upon arrival (N=198)*



*Figure 4.2: Number of closed bedrooms, by immigration status upon arrival (N=198)*



*Figure 4.3: Frequency of moving house since arrival in Canada, by immigration status upon arrival of respondents with 1-4 years' residence in Canada (N=101)*



*Table 4.1: Help received for finding housing, by immigration status upon arrival (N=199)*

	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
Did not receive help to find housing	52.6%	28.3%	71.4%	52.3%
Received help to find housing	47.4%	71.7%	28.6%	47.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100% (N=199)

*Table 4.2: Frequency of certain obstacles faced in regards to housing, by status at arrival, as a percentage of the total number of respondents who experienced at least one obstacle (N=156)*

	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	All respondents
Lack of references	56.2%	43.6%	40.9%	48.7%
Language	38.4%	56.4%	56.8%	48.1%
Source of income (ex. social solidarity , welfare)	35.6%	53.8%	31.8%	39.1%
History of non-existent or bad credit	32.9%	35.9%	31.8%	33.3%
Lack of guarantor	28.8%	38.5%	34.1%	32.7%
Family size	17.8%	33.3%	6.8%	18.6%
Financial crisis or financial problems	12.3%	20.5%	13.6%	14.7%
Country of origin	9.6%	12.8%	13.6%	11.5%
Refugee status or temporary resident status	55%	5.1%	25.0%	10.9%
Family type (ex. single-parent family)	4.1%	12.8%	4.5%	6.4%
Religion or ethnic origin	9.6%	5.1%	0%	5.8%
Skin colour	4.1%	5.1%	2.3%	3.8%
Disability	1.4%	5.1%	4.5%	3.2%
Sex	2.7%	0%	0%	1.3%
Age	0%	0%	2.3%	0.6%
Other type of obstacle	4.1%	7.7%	0%	3.8%
Total – number reporting at least one obstacle	73	39	44	N=156

Note: The column percentages do not total 100% because of multiple responses.

Figure 4.4: Obstacles encountered in terms of access to housing, by immigration status upon arrival (out of a total of 441 obstacles mentioned by respondents)

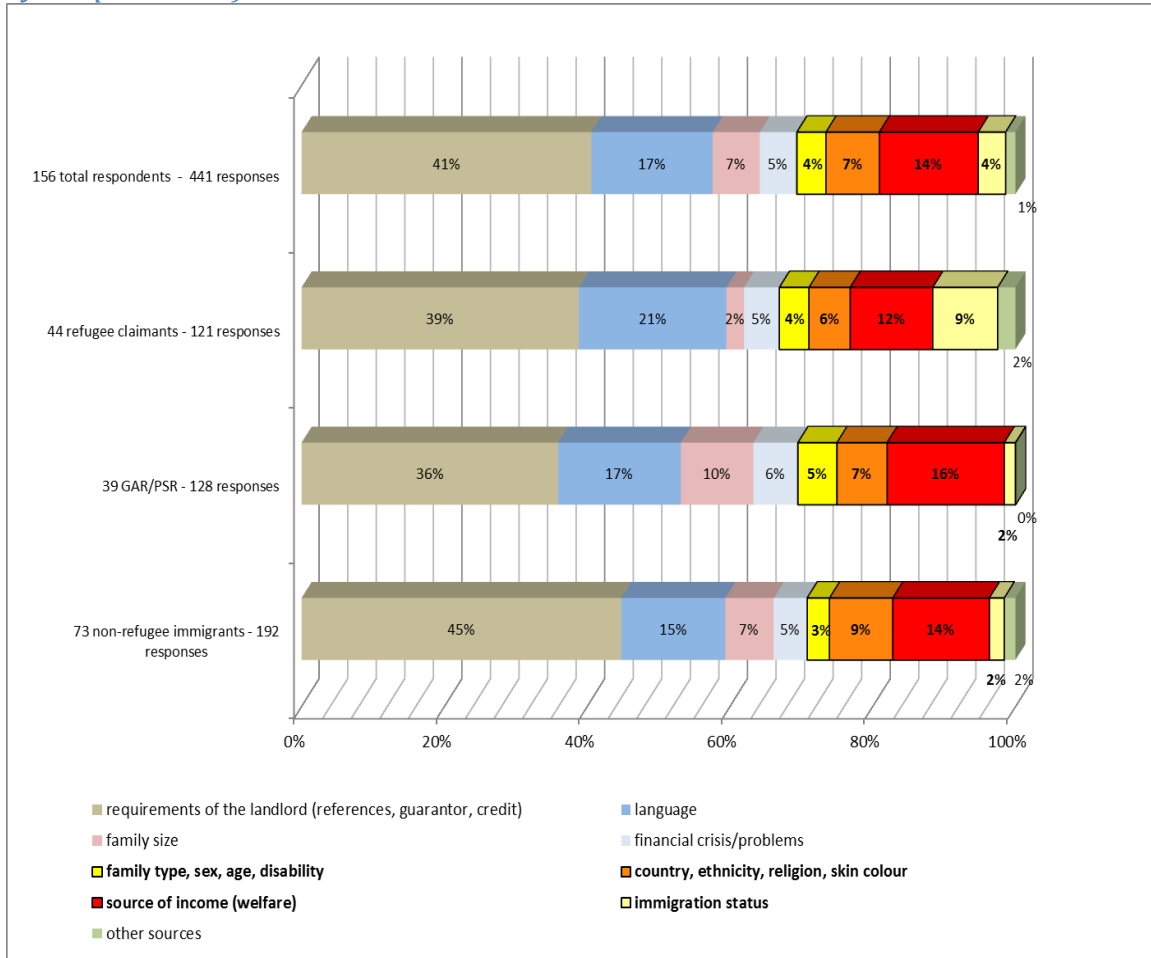




Figure 4.5: Monthly rent, by immigration status upon arrival (N=185)

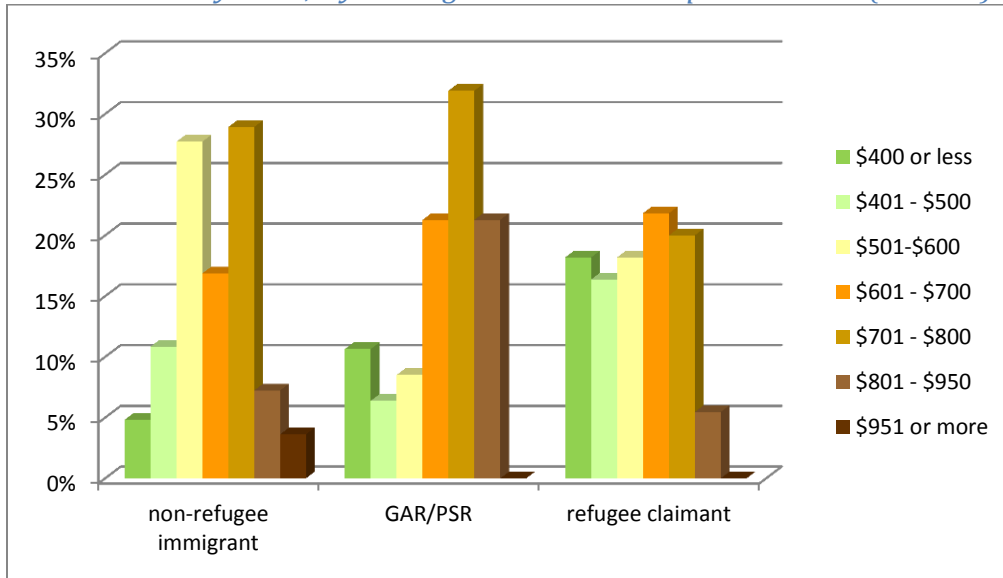


Figure 4.6: Percentage of household income spent on housing costs, by immigration status upon arrival (N=165)

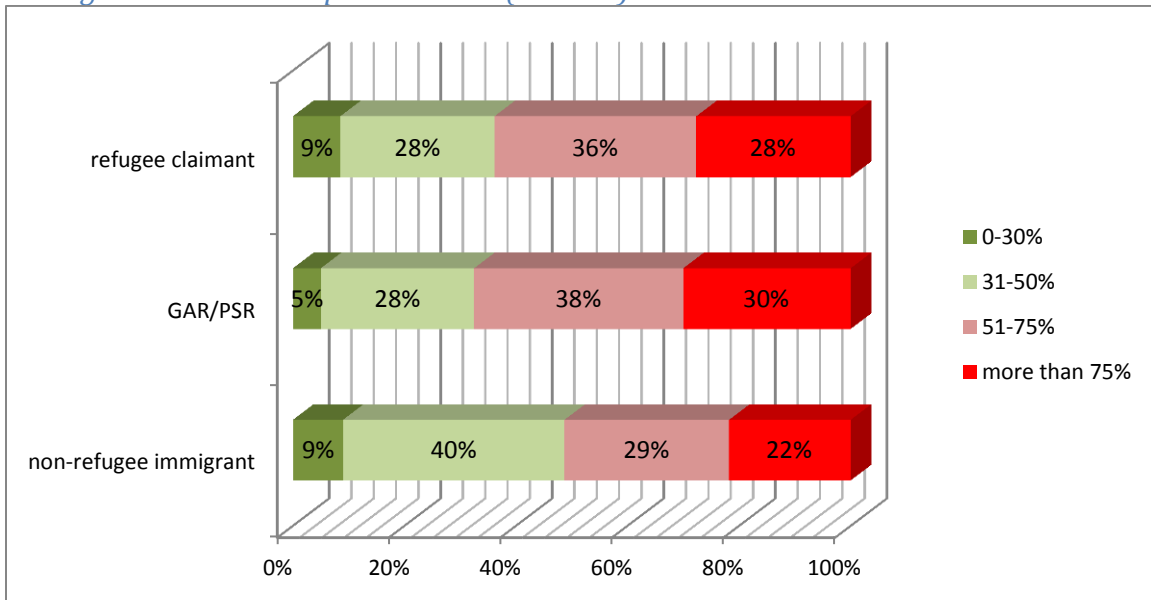


Figure 4.7: Satisfaction with current housing, by immigration status upon arrival (N=200)

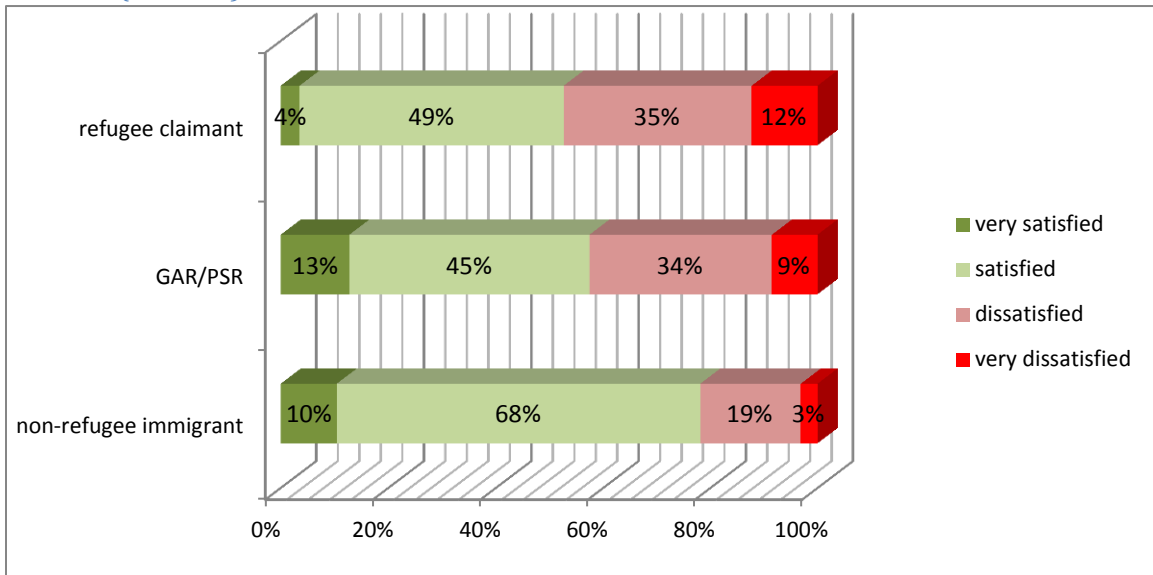


Figure 4.8: Satisfaction with current neighbourhood, by immigration status upon arrival (N=197)

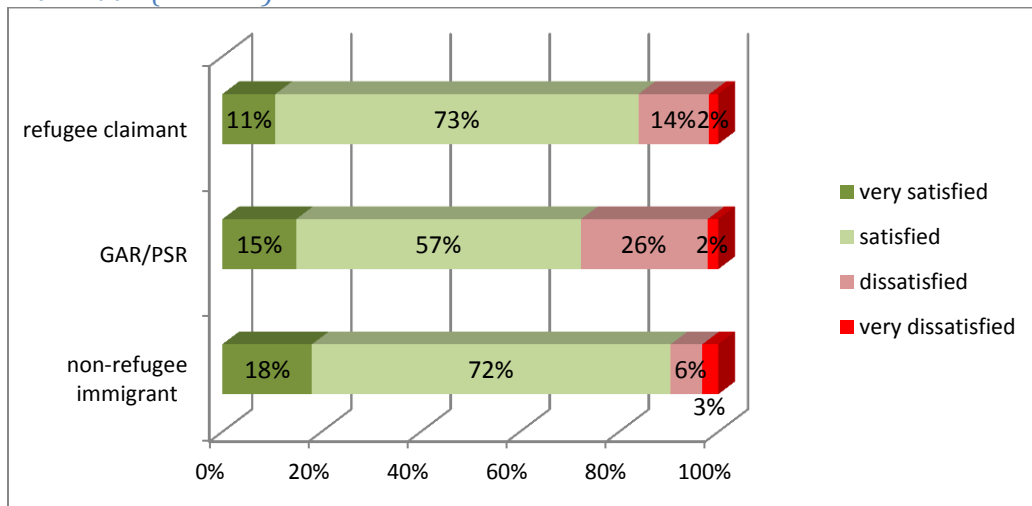


Figure 4.9: Condition of current housing, by immigration status upon arrival (N=198)

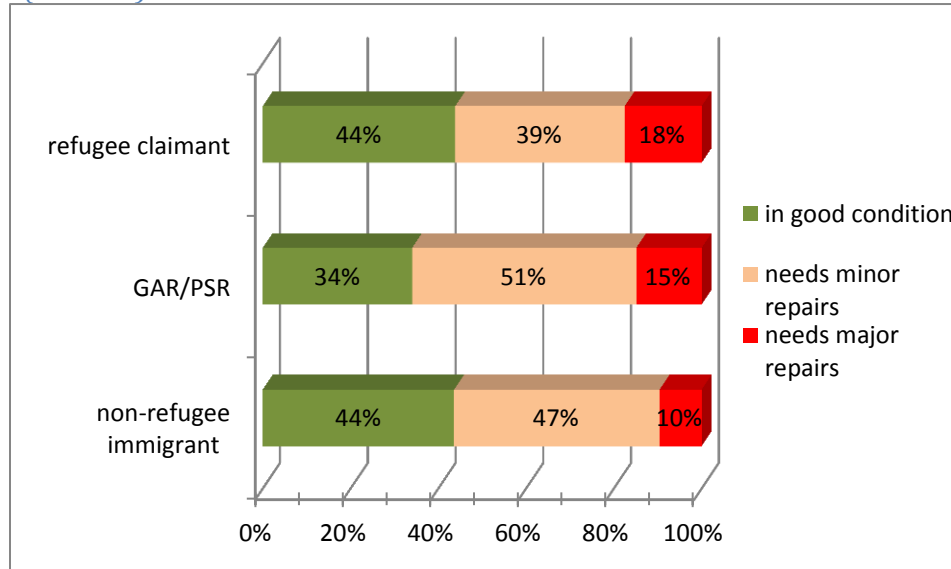
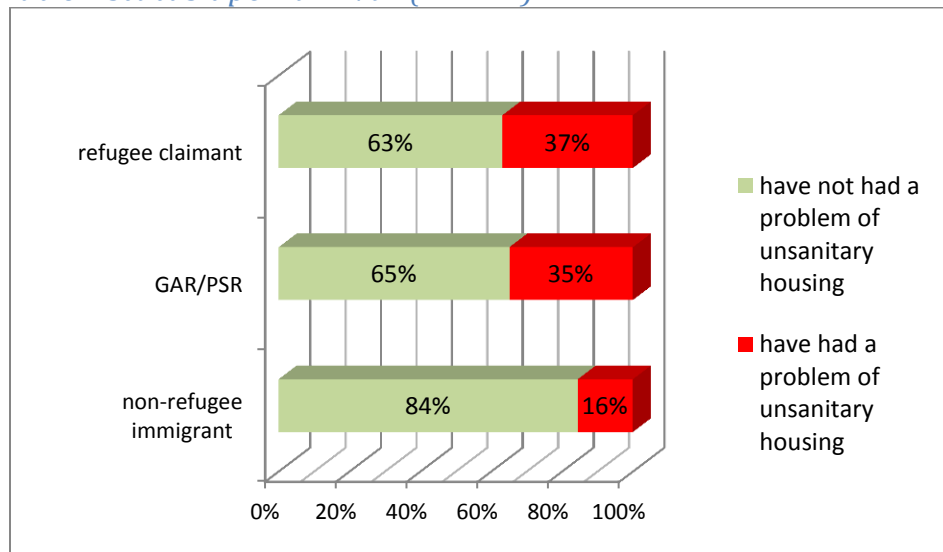


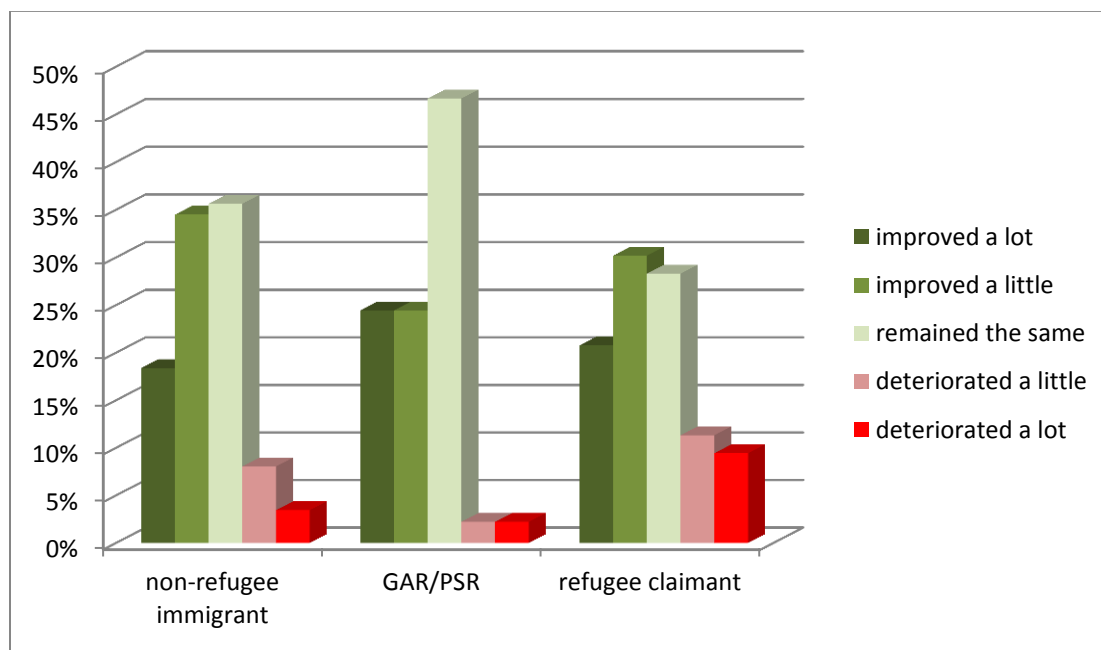
Figure 4.10: Problems with unsanitary housing since arrival, by immigration status upon arrival (N=190)



*Table 4:3: Experience of overcrowding since arrival (N=190)*

	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
Has not experienced an overcrowding problem	80.0%	60.5%	75.4%	74.2%
Has experienced an overcrowding problem	20.0%	39.5%	24.6%	25.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

*Figure 4.11: Improvement or deterioration of housing conditions since arrival in Canada and first housing occupied, by immigration status upon arrival (N=185)*



*Table 4.4: Types of housing help received, by immigration status at arrival (N=154)*

<i>Type of help received</i>	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
Lived with someone for free or in exchange for a small financial contribution	41%	5%	33%	30%
Payment of rent, bills	4%	8%	28%	12%
Finding housing	63%	87%	37%	62%
Moving	48%	61%	19%	43%
Filling out application forms for an apartment	23%	82%	42%	43%
Understanding and signing a lease	47%	87%	30%	52%
Help in the case of a problem with the landlord	18%	42%	14%	23%
Understanding bills related to housing, or negotiating payment arrangements	14%	63%	9%	25%
Obtaining references	30%	29%	7%	23%
Finding a guarantor	18%	13%	12%	15%
Other	1%	0%	0%	1%
Number of respondents who received at least one type of help	73	38	43	N=154

*Table 4.5: Sources of housing help received, by immigration status at arrival (N=154)*

<i>Source of help received</i>	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	refugee claimant	Total
Family member	23%	24%	30%	25%
friend	58%	13%	30%	39%
member of your ethnic community	12%	5%	5%	8%
member of your religious community	1%	5%	7%	4%
organization providing help to new immigrants	29%	84%	40%	45%
organization from your ethnic community	1%	3%	2%	2%
Community-based housing assistance organization	3%	3%	0%	2%
government agency	3%	0%	5%	3%
other source	4%	3%	5%	4%
Number of respondents who received help	73	38	43	N=154

*Table 4.6: Types of housing help given, by immigration status of the respondent who provided help (N=100)*

<i>Types of help given</i>	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
House someone for free or for a minimal financial contribution	19%	9%	21%	17%
Payment of rent, bills	9%	0%	4%	6%
Finding housing	68%	61%	67%	66%
Moving	49%	61%	38%	49%
Filling out application forms for an apartment	11%	30%	17%	17%
Understanding and signing the lease	32%	22%	25%	28%
Help in the case of problems with a landlord	11%	26%	29%	19%
Understand bills related to housing or negotiating payment arrangements	15%	26%	17%	18%
Obtaining references	19%	17%	13%	17%
Finding a guarantor	4%	9%	4%	5%
Other	9%	0%	13%	8%
Number of respondents who helped someone	53	23	24	N=100

*Table 4.7: Recipient of housing help, by immigration status of respondent who offered help (N=99)*

<i>Person to whom help was given</i>	Non-refugee immigrant	GAR/PSR	Refugee claimant	Total
Family member	10%	41%	16%	18%
Friend	79%	59%	64%	71%
Member of your ethnic community	21%	18%	4%	16%
Member of your religious community	2%	5%	12%	5%
Other	8%	14%	12%	10%
Number of respondents who gave help to someone	52	22	25	N=99