

At Home Here?: LGBTQ refugees' housing experiences in Alberta, Canada

by

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## **Abstract**

Canada's *National Housing Strategy* (2017) identifies LGBTQ2 people and newcomers (including refugees) as vulnerable groups within Canada's housing system. Members of *each* group are known to experience significant barriers to housing in Canada. However, the unique experiences of LGBTQ refugees—who fall into *both* groups—have yet to be investigated. As such, this thesis asks: To what extent are LGBTQ refugees able to access safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada? To answer this question, this thesis addresses three primary objectives: 1) to develop a thorough understanding of the legal and policy settings surrounding refugee status and housing in Alberta and Canada; 2) to examine the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees within the housing system using an Intersectional framework; and 3) to develop policy recommendations that can account for and remedy the barriers experienced by LGBTQ refugees in the housing system.

To fulfill these objectives, two methods were employed. First, a policy analysis was conducted, examining a set of documents that shape the context for immigration and housing provision. These documents included housing policies at the municipal, provincial and federal levels; select human rights codes, charters and covenants, and federal immigration law. Second, interviews were conducted with key-informants working in the housing system, as well as in the LGBTQ2- and refugee-serving sectors, to understand the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta. Taken together, the policy analysis and key-informant interviews provide a broad-based account of the barriers to housing encountered by LGBTQ refugees in Alberta.

The policies and interviews were interpreted through two theoretical frameworks: Intersectionality and Homonationalism. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) was employed to

understand how interconnected systems of power and oppression—including, but not limited to, homophobia, racism and capitalism—can compound to produce unique barriers to housing for LGBTQ refugees. Homonationalism (Puar, 2017) was employed to shed light on the ways in which Canada’s image as a ‘safe haven’ for LGBTQ refugees may be undermined by policies that fail to lift them out of a state of housing vulnerability.

Ultimately, this research found that LGBTQ refugees do not have adequate access to safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada. They continue to experience significant barriers related to affordability, social housing supply, and discrimination, among other factors. Indeed, income support programs in Alberta fall significantly short of rendering market-rate housing affordable, as rates fall significantly below the poverty line, leaving recipients in deep poverty. This problem is made worse by the lack of social housing in Alberta, which is accompanied by long-waitlists and strict eligibility requirements. Further, LGBTQ refugees can experience significant discrimination in housing in Alberta, as they are forced to contend with racist, homophobic and xenophobic stigma.

This research also found that many LGBTQ refugees experience barriers that are not directly related to housing, but which nonetheless affect the ways in which they navigate housing and other systems in Alberta. For example, the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) adjudication process can have negative emotional impacts on applicants. Further, LGBTQ refugee claimants cannot access legal aid or income support in Alberta until their claim is submitted.

In light of the barriers to housing LGBTQ refugees continue to experience in Alberta, this research issues eight policy recommendations, targeting housing policy, income support programs, and the production of vulnerability through policy. First, it recommends that the

experience of IRB adjudication be improved for LGBTQ refugees, so they do not experience this process as traumatic. Next, it proposes that policy engage with Intersectionality more deeply in order to identify and target systemic issues. With regards to housing policy, this research recommends that landlords give LGBTQ refugees more resources to navigate the housing system; that governments establish temporary housing for LGBTQ refugee claimants, so they have somewhere to stay until their claim is submitted; and that wait times are reduced for social housing through expansion of supply. Finally, with regards to income support and other programming, this thesis recommends that legal aid be extended to refugee claimants; that access to English language courses be expanded to include refugee claimants; and, that income support and shelter benefits be raised to reflect the true cost of living in Alberta.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original work of Kenna McDowell. This research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “At Home Here?: LGBTQ refugees’ housing experiences in Canada”, Pro 00113337, approved January 12, 2022.

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## **Glossary of terms:**

**AISH:** Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, a provincial social assistance program for individuals with disabilities.

**CHC:** Calgary Housing Company.

**CMHC:** Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This is a Crown corporation which delivers federal funding to housing through the *National Housing Act*, as well as conducts independent research into the housing market. CMHC is also a public mortgage insurer and is the only mortgage insurer of multi-unit residential properties in Canada. Finally, CMHC offers loan insurance to buyers with less than a 20% down payment.

**Cisgender:** When one's gender identity conforms to their gender assigned at birth

**ESC Rights:** Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which are human rights identified and protected by the United Nations.

**GAR:** Government-Assisted Refugees. GARs are referred to Canada through the United Nations Refugee Agency, and receive public support for their first 12 months in Canada.

**IBPA:** Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis, a research method.

**IRB:** Immigration and Refugee Board, an administrative tribunal which makes decisions regarding immigration and refugee matters in Canada.

**IRPA:** The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, federal legislation.

**LGBTI:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex; this is an acronym typically employed in international law and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights.

**LGBTQ:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer; this is an acronym typically employed in immigration law. This is the acronym predominately used to refer to queer refugees in this thesis, as the '2' in LGBTQ2 refers to Two-Spirit peoples, a form of queer identity which is claimed by various Indigenous nations and peoples in North America.

**LGBTQ2:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Two-Spirit; the acronym employed by the Canadian federal government.

**NHS:** *National Housing Strategy*, the federal government's housing strategy, released in 2017.

**NHS Act:** *National Housing Strategy Act 2019*, the legislation which governs the *National Housing Strategy*.

**OHCHR:** Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights.

**RAP:** Resettlement Assistance Program, a program which provides assistance to refugees during their first 12 months in Canada.

**SOGIE:** Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression. This acronym is employed by the Canadian federal government to designate individuals who apply for asylum on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

**Transgender:**

- I. When one's gender identity does not conform to their gender assigned at birth
- II. An umbrella term that defines all those who do not identify as cisgender (i.e., transwomen and transmen, non-binary people, agender people, genderfluid people, etc.)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2017, *The National Housing Strategy (NHS)* identified both LGBTQ2 people and newcomers to Canada (encompassing immigrants and refugees) as two of twelve ‘vulnerable groups’ that experience housing precarity in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Addressing the housing needs of these groups is deemed a ‘priority area for action’ (Canada, 2017). Despite the emphasis placed on these classifications, the *NHS* does not meaningfully interrogate the nature of the vulnerability ascribed to these populations; it does not consider *why* they are vulnerable, *how* this vulnerability manifests, or *what* systems and processes produce this vulnerability.

Perhaps even more pressingly, the *NHS* seems to treat these groups as discrete; their struggles and marginalization as unrelated. Ultimately, the *NHS* does not acknowledge how the vulnerability of these groups can be compounded and exacerbated due to a plurality of membership. Our identities do not exist in silos, and many individuals and households will belong to more than one of the ‘vulnerable groups’ outlined above. As such, it is important to note that while this research focuses on the intersection of two vulnerable groups as named in the *NHS*—newcomers and LGBTQ2 people—LGBTQ refugees will inevitably occupy multiple subject positions or ‘intersections’. Indeed, their lives may be shaped by intersections such as racialization and economic class, in addition to their refugee status and queerness. These intersections will be explored throughout the thesis, but especially in Chapter 4. In both the policy analysis (4.1) and key-informant interviews (4.2), the ways in which factors such as inadequate social assistance rates and discrimination within housing influence the housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees are considered in depth.

Existing academic literature on housing also tends to treat LGBTQ identities and migration status as discrete categories with very little overlap. Research on the

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to LGBTQ people and newcomers, the *NHS* also names survivors of family violence; people with disabilities; people who experience mental health and addiction issues; veterans; Indigenous peoples; young adults; racialized people; seniors; and individuals and families experiencing homelessness as vulnerable within the Canadian housing sector.

experiences of immigrants and refugees in the housing sector tends to focus exclusively on the experiences of cisgender and heterosexual refugees. The existing research that does examine the experiences of LGBTQ refugees focuses primarily on their experiences testifying in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). Consequently, the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees post-settlement remain largely unexplored.

In Canada, the vulnerabilities of the general refugee population are well-documented. Extant research has established that refugees—and indeed migrants more generally—experience three primary barriers to obtaining and retaining adequate housing: low incomes (Akter et al., 2013); inadequate social assistance (Wayland, 2007); and discrimination (Akter et al., 2013; Hiebert et al., 2009; Vink & Ball, 2017). The failure of governments to ensure this population has access to fair wages, adequate supports, and to housing free of discrimination produces vulnerability in refugees and immigrants that would not otherwise exist. While it is likely that LGBTQ refugees experience similar barriers to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, it is not possible to know this for sure, given the lack of research in this area. The unique experiences of LGBTQ refugees, as informed by the intersection of their sexual orientation, gender identity and migration status, have also been left largely uninterrogated.

This thesis examines the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta. The central question guiding this research is: *To what extent are LGBTQ refugees able to access safe, affordable and stable housing in Alberta, Canada?* To answer this question, this research addresses three primary objectives:

1. To develop a thorough understanding of the legal and policy settings surrounding refugee status and housing in Alberta and Canada;
2. To examine the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees within the Albertan housing sector using an intersectional framework;
3. To develop policy recommendations that can account for and remedy the barriers experienced by LGBTQ refugees in the Canadian housing sector.



The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. First, the empirical context of the research is presented, encompassing a brief history of Alberta and its relationship to Indigenous peoples, and an introduction to the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and their housing markets (including homeownership and rental). Second, an overview of current scholarly knowledge relevant to understanding the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees is provided. Third, two key theories that inform this research are introduced and explained. The chapter then concludes with an outline of the organization of this thesis.

## 1.1 Empirical context

This research explores the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta's housing sector. As such, a brief description of Alberta's history, as well as its housing markets, is necessary. Much of Alberta's population is concentrated in the province's two major cities—Edmonton and Calgary—so these cities will be the focus on this section. This focus is also reflected in the key-informant interviews, with all participants working in either Edmonton or Calgary.

### 1.1.2 History of Alberta

Much like the rest of Canada, the province of Alberta was created through process of settler-colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Alberta is the site of several separate numbered treaties, including Treaty 6 (encompassing North-Central Alberta, including Edmonton), Treaty 7 (encompassing Southern Alberta, including Calgary) and Treaty 8 (encompassing the areas North of Edmonton). The map below shows the territories covered by each Treaty, and the locations of major Indigenous communities:

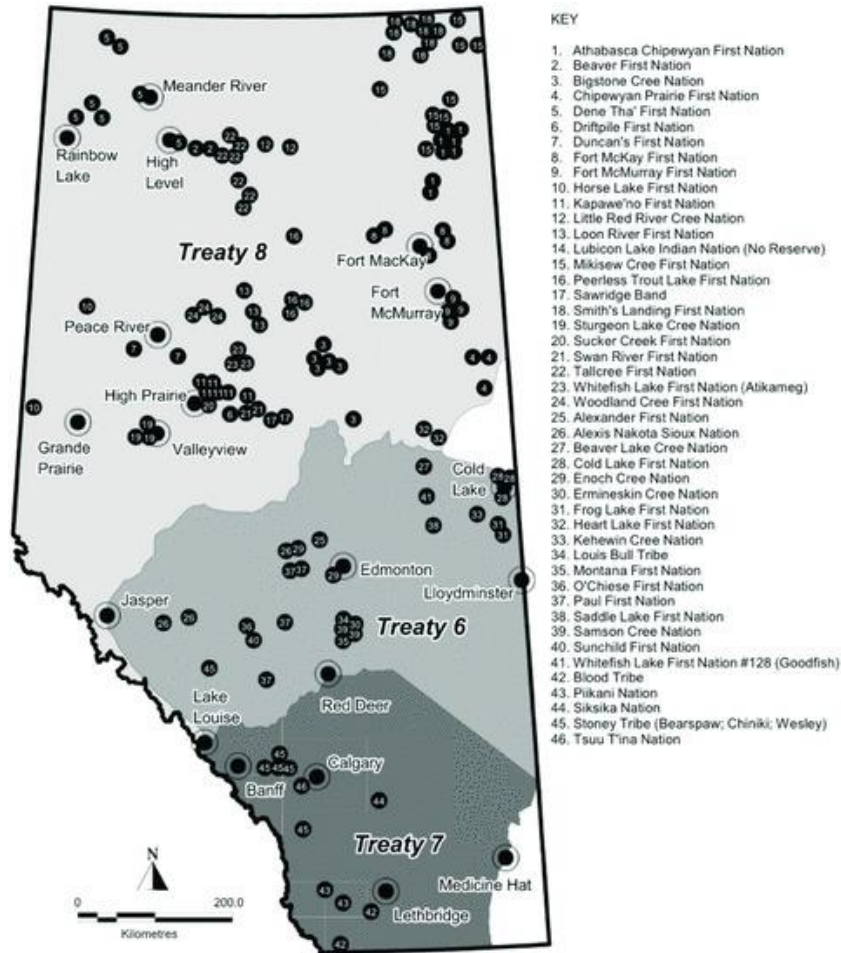


Figure 1: Treaty Map of Alberta (source: Northern Spirit Regional Council, n.d.)

Treaty 6 was signed by 50 Indigenous Nations in 1876 at Fort Carleton, including the Cree, Salteaux, Nakota and Dene peoples. Treaty 7 was signed the following year in 1877 at Soyoohpawahko, or Bowfoot Crossing, and was signed by five Nations, including the Kanai (Blood), Siksika (Blackfoot), Piikani (Peigan), Nakoda (Stoney) and Tsuu T'ina (Sarcee) peoples. Finally, Treaty 8 was signed in 1899 at Lesser Slave Lake and was signed by 24 Indigenous Nations (Empowering the Spirit, 2017).

It is important to note that these Treaties meant something different to settlers than they did to the Indigenous peoples who signed them. Indigenous signatory nations believed them to be oral agreements that established the sharing of the land that is now Alberta. However, when these oral agreements were later written out by the government, many of the original provisions were omitted, and settlers used these

Treaties to take control of this land and to “assimilate First Nation peoples into white, colonial society and culture” (Empowering the Spirit, 2017, n.p.). One cannot discuss the history of Alberta without discussing the ways in which this province relies on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, as well as the dishonestly perpetuated by settlers during Treaty negotiations. The land in which Albertans—including myself—live and work is intertwined with these histories of violence, theft and lies.

### 1.1.3. Population

Today, the province of Alberta is home to 4,480,486 people (Government of Alberta, 2022). As mentioned earlier, this population is largely concentrated in the province’s two major cities. The population of the City of Calgary is 1,306,784 people (Statistics Canada, 2021a). This is slightly larger than Edmonton’s population, which is 1,010,899 people (Statistics Canada, 2021b).

### 1.1.4 The City of Calgary (Mohkinstsis)

Despite Edmonton and Calgary being quite close together (separated only by about three hours by car), these cities have distinct cultures onto themselves. Calgary is frequently referred to by its nickname ‘Cowtown’, due to its links to ranching and cowboy culture, including The Calgary Stampede. This 10-day long festival takes place in July of each year, which includes rodeos, parties, and many performances by country musicians. Calgary is also considerably more politically conservative than Edmonton, with the United Conservative Party—the major right-wing party in Alberta—winning the majority of the ridings in the province’s 2019 election (CBC News, April 17 2019). Calgary is also quite diverse, and was home to 404,700 immigrants according to the 2016 Census (Statistics Canada, 2016a). Moreover, Calgary is popular choice for immigrants who initially settled elsewhere in Canada, and then decided to relocate again.

Much like the rest of Alberta, Calgary’s economy is largely based around the oil and gas industry. Many oil companies are based out of Calgary, making it a very

wealthy city, with a median total income of households of \$99,388 (Statistics Canada, 2016b). Despite this, rental rates in Calgary remain comparable to rental rates in Alberta and Canada generally (see Table 1).

#### 1.1.5 The City of Edmonton (Amiskwaciy Waskahikan)

Edmonton does not have the same ties to cowboy culture as Calgary, and instead places emphasis on its artistic and cultural communities. This is reflected by the many festivals the city hosts throughout the year, including the Edmonton Fringe Festival, the Edmonton Folk Music Festival and the Edmonton International Street Performers Festival, all of which are recognized internationally (City of Edmonton, 2008, p. 7). Edmonton is also a ‘university town’, as it is home to the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and Concordia University. Edmonton contributes significantly to the 264,000 students enrolled in universities and colleges across the province (Alberta Government, 2021), making Alberta “one of Canada’s research and education centres” (City of Edmonton, 2008, p. 9).

Much like Calgary, Edmonton is a destination for immigrants coming to Canada. Indeed, as of 2016, 274,360 of the approximately 1 million people living in Edmonton were immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016c). It also has significant ties to the oil and gas industry, contributing to the city’s wealth. That said, unlike Calgary, Edmonton is politically left, with almost all ridings held by the Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP) — the main social democratic party in the province (CBC News, 2019).

#### 1.1.6 Housing markets in Calgary and Edmonton

Information on Calgary and Edmonton’s housing markets—as compared with the province of Alberta and the rest of Canada—is provided in the table below. As the table demonstrates, rental rates across the province are on par with the national average, while home ownership is considerably cheaper in Alberta when compared to the national average. It is important to note that while home ownership in Alberta is

affordable when compared to the national average, this does not mean that it is affordable in practice for many Albertans, given their actual incomes.

	Avg. 1-bdrm rent	Avg. 2-bdrm rent	Rental vacancy rate	Avg. house sale price (owner-occupied private dwelling)
Calgary	\$1,111	\$1,357	5.2%	\$538,000
Edmonton	\$1,038	\$1,270	7.3%	\$437,500
All Alberta	\$1,049	\$1,254	6.8%	\$449,379
Canada	\$1,071	\$1,167	3.1%	\$782,400

*Table 1: Housing prices across Alberta (Sources: CMHC 2022a, CMHC 2022b, CMHC 2022c, CMHC 2022d, CMHC 2022e)*

### 1.2 Academic Context

This section summarizes what is known with regards to the housing vulnerability experienced by LGBTQ2 people and immigrants and refugees, respectively. It will begin by describing the housing vulnerability experienced by immigrants and refugees, followed by a similar description of the housing vulnerability experienced by LGBTQ2 people. As the intersection of queerness and migration status is under-researched, these groups will be presented as discrete categories, although there is certainly considerable overlap.

Overall, low income among refugees and immigrants has been identified as one of the key barriers to finding and maintaining adequate housing. In 2013, the majority of immigrants in Canada (63%) reported household incomes of less than \$30,000, with 15% reporting an annual income of less than \$10,000 (Akter et al., 2013, p. 24). Among

recent immigrants, 57% reported annual incomes of less than \$10,000 (Akter et al., 2013, p. 24). More recent data suggests that the median wage for immigrants admitted to Canada in 2018 was \$31,900 (Statistics Canada, 2021c). The median wage for refugees was considerably lower, however, at \$19,200 (Statistics Canada, 2021c). This poverty is also racialized, as racialized immigrant communities suffer disproportionately from poverty in Canada (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2015, p. 9). It is important to note that there are very few rental units in Canada that are affordable to people on very low incomes, in part due to “losses from the rental inventory...at the bottom end of the spectrum” (Francis & Hiebert, 2014, p. 65).

While immigrants and refugees are generally eligible for social assistance, these supports are often inadequate and still leave many recipients in poverty. For example, Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) do receive public support, including a monthly allowance for food and shelter, from the Canadian government, to which they were referred by the United Nations Refugee Agency (Government of Canada, 2021, November 12). GARs receive funding through the Resettlement Assistance Program, otherwise known as RAP. However, this support is typically based on provincial social assistance rates, which leaves GARs below the poverty line, in the absence of any other income (Wayland, 2007). It also ceases after one year, or sooner if the recipient is able to find employment (Wayland, 2007).

Not all refugees come to Canada as GARs; they may also enter as either Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) or as refugee claimants. Individuals admitted through the PSR program are supported by their private sponsors (which can either be a group of people or an official organization, including faith-based groups and settlement organizations) for their first year in Canada (UNHCR, 2022). This support includes “providing the cost of food, rent and household utilities and other day-to-day living expenses” (Government of Canada, 2022, May 30). Finally, refugee claimants or asylum seekers are individuals who are already in Canada, and who submit a claim to the Immigration and Refugee Board that cannot return to their country of origin due to fear of persecution (Government of Canada, 2021, November 15).

The social assistance currently available to many immigrants and refugees in Canada falls short of helping them secure long-term, adequate housing. This is particularly troublesome considering affordable and stable housing is a crucial component of the settlement process for refugees, as it provides them “a basis from which [to] look for jobs, language training, and other services they need to get established in their new country” (Carter & Osborne, 2009, p. 309). Indeed, this general point is acknowledged in the *NHS*, which states: “[h]aving a home makes it possible to access employment, enroll in school, and open a bank account. A home provides shelter, security, and a place to raise our families” (Canada, 2017, p. 18).

Finally, immigrants and refugees experience difficulty in finding and maintaining adequate housing due to persistent discrimination in the Canadian housing sector. In a study of the housing experiences of immigrants and refugees living in Vancouver, British Columbia, many participants reported that they were denied housing due to their status, as landlords often assumed that they have no jobs, and therefore no means of paying rent (Hiebert et al., 2009). Other refugees reported feeling that they were denied housing due to their family size (including the fact that they had children), their old age, their disability, their race, or because of their culture (Vink & Ball, 2017). When refugees are able to find housing within the private rental market, landlords may exploit them; renting out units in need of major repair, refusing to resolve issues such as mould, failing to heat units consistently, and refusing to return damage deposits (Vink & Ball, 2017).

In addition to the forms of housing vulnerability experienced by immigrants and refugees, Canadian LGBTQ households are known to experience housing discrimination (Lyons et al., 2019; Kattari et al., 2016) and heightened risk of homelessness (Frederick, 2014; Ecker et al., 2019; Connery, 2014). The discrimination that LGBTQ people experience happens not only within the private rental system (Lyons et al., 2019), but also within emergency shelters (Connery, 2014). In addition, the housing vulnerability this creates can be compounded by an array of factors, including employment discrimination and economic precarity (Frederick, 2014; Karabanow et al., 2010), as well as a general inability to access social supports (Frederick, 2014; Guadalupe-Diaz & Jasinski, 2016). It is therefore extremely likely that LGBTQ refugees

experience overlapping forms of disadvantage in the Albertan housing sector. However, this issue is yet to be investigated by researchers. This study will seek to fill the gap in knowledge by focusing on how the intersection of queerness and migration status produces particular vulnerabilities, and therefore, the need for unique policy responses and supports.

### 1.3 Theoretical frameworks

In this section, the two main theoretical frameworks employed in this thesis – homonationalism and intersectionality – will be described in detail. Homonationalism is employed as a lens through which to analyze Canada’s immigration system and housing policies, and how these impact the lives and housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees. In a similar vein, intersectionality is employed to better understand the ways in which intersecting systems of power (such as capitalism and heteropatriarchy) affect the housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees.

#### 1.3.1 Homonationalism

Homonationalism describes Canada’s construction of itself as a hospitable and tolerant state, as well as a means through which the biopolitical will of the Canadian state is exercised. In this section, the ways in which Canada engages in homonationalism—and the pinkwashing that undergirds it—will be unpacked more fully. It will explore the ways in which policies implemented by the Canadian state construct (and are constructed by) notions of normative and non-normative queerness. Additionally, the ways in which Canada is dependent on pinkwashing to support its public image as a ‘safe haven’ for LGBTQ people will be examined. Finally, the ways in which these issues come to bear on the lives of queer refugees in Canada will be identified and explored.

It is worth noting that homonationalism has a lot in common with ‘sexual citizenship’, a concept often discussed in queer and feminist theory. Sexual citizenship is a broad term that emerged in the 1990s to describe “a particular kind of sexual politics that...sought to articulate struggles for equality and social justice in terms of the



language of citizenship at both national and international levels” (Richardson, 2017, p. 208). In particular, there is considerable overlap between homonationalism’s interest in normative and non-normative queerness and sexual citizenship’s focus on the ways in which “gender, race and class, [and] understandings of citizenship are historically grounded in normative assumptions about sexuality” (Richardson, 2017, p. 211). That said, homonationalism was selected as a theoretical framework for this thesis due to its links to biopolitics, and the indispensability of this concept to understanding how policy functions to ‘abandon’ LGBTQ refugees, compromising their ability to access safe, stable and affordable housing.

#### 1.3.1.1 From heteronormativity to homonationalism:

To understand the ‘homonormativity’ from which ‘homonationalism’ emerges, we must first understand the structure of ‘heteronormativity’ which has helped to shape, and continues to underpin, these concepts. For foundational queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998):

[h]eteronormativity is more than ideology, or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education; as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance and other protected spaces of culture (pp. 554-555).

Berlant and Warner (1998) go on to explain that heteronormativity is what renders heterosexuality “seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (footnote, p. 548). It is the means through which heterosexuality comes to be understood both as a natural state and a moral accomplishment. In this sense, heteronormativity is a *structuring* force in society. It privileges heterosexuality over all other sexual orientations; or perhaps, more accurately, heterosexuality is the only privileged sexual form. What this means in a practical sense is that individuals who can embody ‘proper’ heterosexuality are folded into the life-giving and life-affirming powers of the state, and others who cannot are excluded.

It is from this concept of heteronormativity that homonormativity emerges. Codified by Lisa Duggan (2003), homonormativity represents a 'neoliberal sexual politics' (Schotten, 2016) that "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (p. 50). Put simply, homonormativity is not a structuring institution (like heteronormativity), but rather, a politic that seeks acceptance for some queer people within the dominant institutions that heteronormativity controls. Indeed, for Duggan—and later, for Jasbir Puar—homonormativity is a means through which neoliberalism is embodied and lived by queer people in certain countries, including Canada.

This is not to say that Duggan's homonormativity functions to evaluate individual queer people; one cannot simply or neatly opt in or out of homonormativity. Rather, it aims to describe a neoliberal politic of which queer people are part; a politic which has come to be defined by "the upward distribution of wealth, the privatization of public goods and the sovereignty of the market" (Schotten, 2016, p. 354). Certainly, various queer people may have more buy in to these systems—or be more readily accepted by them—but this is not what homonormativity seeks to explore. Rather, as a concept, homonormativity functions to describe and evaluate the ways in which queer people have been absorbed by neoliberalism over the past few decades. One such example of this is the absorption of queer people into the normative institution of marriage. The legalization of marriage for 'same-sex' couples worked to assimilate certain queer people into relationships that aligned with the state's "cultural, social and legal ideal" (Franke, 2006, p. 247), while nonetheless failing to meet the material needs of queer people, as marriage confers formal, but not substantive, equality (see: Franke, 2006; Spade & Willse, 2005).

It is from this understanding of homonormativity that Puar's (2017) concept of homonationalism emerges. Homonationalism builds on Duggan's critiques of neoliberalism and describes the ways in which (some) queer people have been absorbed by and incorporated into some nation-states. To put it plainly "the nation-state

is homonational” (Schotten, 2016, p. 354), due to the various ways in which it has absorbed queer people into its social, political, and economic systems.

### **1.3.1.2 What is homonationalism?**

Homonationalism is—in part—a process through which normative queers are assimilated into the nation state through institutions such as marriage, the family and the military. While this thesis is focused on Canada, homonationalism also occurs in countries like the United States, which engage in similar political rhetoric. For the purposes of this thesis, normative queerness can be best understood as a form of queerness that can be integrated into the Canadian ‘status quo’; a formation aligned with whiteness, settler-colonialism, patriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism (Paur, 2017). It is through the inclusion of normative queers in such institutions that they “become accepted and realigned with patriotic and nationalist ideologies of their countries” (Schulman, 2012, p. 103).

This incorporation of certain queers into the nation state is evidenced by gains in legal rights for LGBTQ people, such as the right to same-sex marriage or the right to serve in the military. It is through these forms of conditional acceptance that queers are no longer “feared as the threat to family and nation that they were once seen to be” (Schulman, 2012, p. 103). That said, it is important to emphasize that this acceptance is *conditional*, and can therefore be revoked at any time. Indeed, queers become folded into the nation when they can successfully demonstrate that they are ‘just like straight people,’ save for their sexual orientation. Through processes of assimilation, the threat that queerness poses to the nation, and the institutions that constitute and uphold it, are neutralized.

It is in this way that homonationalism transforms a certain kind of queer—a white, upwardly mobile, Canadian citizen from ‘a stigmatic marker of death’ to an ‘aspirational symbol for life’ (Puar cited in Schotten, 2020, p. 20). Rather than queerness being outside or opposed to the nation, it has been ‘rehabilitated’ into “nationalist and consumerist forms of liberal multicultural citizenship and domesticity” (Schotten, 2020, p. 20). Under homonationalism, the ideal queer embodies “normalcy, respectability and

citizenship” (Schotten, 2020, p. 20), while all those who cannot attain this standard of ‘perfection’ (including the refugee) are excluded from the nation and its life-giving powers. Instead of being seen as a threat to the nation and its institutions, *certain* queers have become emblematic of the nation’s tolerance and acceptance of select forms of difference.

As such, under homonationalism, it is not only queers who are transformed but the nation itself. Indeed, the queers who earn acceptance into the nation through its dominant institutions are “held up as a symbol of that country’s commitment to progress and modernity” (Schulman, 2012, p. 103). In the case of Canada, the conditional acceptance of (some) queers (particularly white Canadian citizens, who lead homonormative and non-threatening lifestyles) helps to symbolically transform the country from a settler-colony, which perpetrates violence at home and abroad, to a hospitable and welcoming ‘safe haven’ for difference.

Because of this, the state has become invested in the lives of queers who render such a transformation possible. In a biopolitical sense, homonationalism functions to stave off the death of normative queers, to make their lives possible. As Jasbir Puar (2017) so aptly puts it in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, the state seeks to cultivate the lives of normative queers (normativity here being represented primarily by white queer citizens), but does so at the expense of (racialized, poor, immigrant) queers who are unable to assimilate into the nation-state. This failure to assimilate is not a personal failing, of course, but rather an exclusion perpetuated by the state itself. Indeed, Puar (2017) writes that “[c]ultivating life is coextensive with the sovereign right to kill, and death becomes merely reflective, a byproduct, a secondary effect of the primary aim and efforts of those cultivating or being cultivated for life” (p. 33). Put simply, while the state has become invested in making certain queers live, it has abandoned certain other queers and allowed their deaths to become a by-product of the quest to sustain normative queer life.

It is clear that the rejection and abandonment of ‘non-normative’ or ‘deviant’ queers is as central to the homonational project as the acceptance and celebration of normative ones. Just as normative queerness is a “formation complicit with and invited

into the biopolitical valorization of life”, non-normative queerness is subject to a de-valuation of life under homonational biopolitics (Puar, 2017, p. 9). Such a de-valuation becomes evident through an unequal distribution of “life and death, wealth and poverty, health and illness, living and dying” (Trevenen & Degagne, 2015, p. 2360).

It is important to note that such distributions and devaluations happen along racial lines, with ‘whiteness’ and ‘normativity’ functioning as synonyms in the context of homonational biopolitics. Indeed, a core component of homonational politics is what Puar (2017) terms the ‘ascendancy of whiteness’ (p. 2). That is, to be considered a normative subject—and therefore folded into life and the nation—you must also be a *white* subject. As such, all ‘othered’ sexual-racial subjects fall out of the purview of normativity—and therefore the life-giving gifts of the nation—and become subject to “an imperial biopolitics that exerts terrorizing control over othered racial and sexual populations marked for death” (Dryden & Lennon, 2015, p. 223). While white queer Canadian citizens are folded into life under homonational biopolitics, the figure of the refugee gets pushed into this othered sexual-racial space by the Canadian state. This is particularly true of SOGIE refugees, whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression (functioning as the basis for their asylum claim) is continually called into question by adjudicators at the Immigration and Refugee Board and by officials working in immigration (Mulé, 2019). Indeed, the figure of

[t]he ‘bogus refugee’ thus joins the ‘queue jumpers’, ‘the terrorists’, and the ‘dependants’ –racialized figures, positioned as threatening, who wait at Canadian borders looking for a gap in security or an excess of the mythological Canadian softheartedness, a mythology belied by the falling numbers of refugees actually accepted into Canada (Trevenen & Degagne, 2015, p. 2490).

Unlike the normative queer citizens who get folded into Canada’s national imaginary, queer refugees find themselves positioned outside, and in opposition to, the nation. This positioning leads to biopolitical abandonment; the state does not implement policies that cultivate life for this population, rather they are afforded bare minimum safeguards. Such safeguards include social assistance rates that fail to lift queer refugees—and recipients generally—above the poverty line, or allow them to access

housing that is affordable, secure and adequate. From this perspective, queer refugees are punished for their deviancy from a norm they were never permitted to access in the first instance, and are met on all sides by policy bereft of compassion or humanity—something to be discussed in further detail later.

### 1.3.1.3 What is pinkwashing?

Pinkwashing is a core component of homonationalism and of Canadian state-craft. Put simply, it is the aspect of homonationalism that produces Canada (and other states who engage in these sorts of politics) as ‘LGBTQ- friendly’ or ‘progressive’ or ‘safe havens for difference’ (the list goes on ad nauseum), despite violence done to queer people within Canada’s borders (and outside them, given that many queer people are denied asylum in Canada). Pinkwashing is the means through which “the state frames SOGIEs<sup>2</sup> as a vulnerable group protected by equality-based human rights legislation and then holds this SOGIE group up as an example of an enlightened and progressive country” despite the oppressive forces of the Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada’s housing system, and social assistance programs which leave queer refugees (among others) with little support (Mulé, 2019, p. 208). Through pinkwashing, Canada constructs itself as *superior* and *more progressive, enlightened, and civilized* than countries that ‘treat their queers worse’. The enfranchisement of normative queers under homonationalist politics—and the subsequent pinkwashing through which this enfranchisement is expressed and marketed on the global stage—allows Canada to obfuscate the reality of poverty and stigma that queer refugees (as well as many other non-normative queers) must contend with in Canada.

As Sarah Schulman (2011) states, “gay rights have essentially become a public relations tool” (n.p.). In Canada, pinkwashing functions to obscure the violence that the Canada state imparts on its queer populations every day, through the denial of housing

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<sup>2</sup> The acronym SOGIE refers to ‘sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.’ In Canada, refugees can make an asylum claim if they are experiencing discrimination or oppression on these grounds in their country of origin.

access, inadequate social assistance rates, or the rejection of queer refugees altogether. Through its strategic engagement with pinkwashing, Canada is able to project a public image of itself as a 'safe haven' for queer people (including queer refugees), despite its policies continually failing them.

#### 1.3.1.4 What are the consequences of homonationalism and pinkwashing?

One of the primary effects of this kind of politics is the rejection of SOGIE refugees, who are framed as 'suspicious' or 'threatening' because they are pushed outside of the realm of normative queerness. Indeed, according to Mulé (2019), SOGIE refugee claimants are expected to adhere to homonationalist and normative conceptions of queerness, and when they fail to do so, they are denied asylum in Canada. During the adjudication process, queer refugees must attempt to render their queerness intelligible to the Immigration and Refugee Board, usually by adhering to normative Western narratives surrounding 'coming out' and 'LGBTQ identity.' Due to this focus on proving identity over persecution, many LGBTQ people are faced with an impossible burden of proof (Mulé, 2019).

Canada is one of the 42 states internationally that provides asylum on the basis of persecution due to sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. That said, "recent developments suggest that rather than increasing or maintaining protection for refugees, Canada is becoming decidedly unwelcoming" (Envisioning Global LGBT Rights, 2015, p. 11). Indeed between 2010 and 2015, Canada slipped from fifth to fifteenth in terms of total asylum claims received amongst high income nations (Envisioning Global LGBT Rights, 2015, p. 11). Despite Canada's outward projection of itself as an accepting and tolerant nation, it has grown less accepting of asylum seekers (including SOGIE refugees) over the years.

Despite Canada's self-representation as a 'safe haven' for queer people, for many queer asylum claimants, "arrival and claiming asylum, as well as the experience of settlement in Canada, are shaped by incidents of homo-, bi-, and transphobia and racism" (Envisioning Global LGBT Rights, 2015, p. 45). These experiences of marginalization extend into spheres such as housing, as queer refugees have reported

that their status as a queer person, an immigrant and/or someone who receives social assistance “had an impact on their ability to access basic services such as housing” (Envisioning Global LGBT Rights, 2015, p. 45). Again, we see that Canada remains a hostile place for those queer people who are unable to conform to normative ideals of queerness.

#### 1.3.1.5 Conclusion

As discussed throughout this section, homonationalism represents a biopolitical strategy of the Canadian state that aims to cultivate life for some queer people, while leaving non-normative queers (such as queer refugees) to fend for themselves. Pinkwashing facilitates this biopolitical will, as it enables Canada to construct itself as a benevolent and tolerant state despite the ways that ‘deviant’ queers are treated within and outside its borders. Homonationalism and pinkwashing can have devastating effects for queer refugees and other non-normative queer people. Ultimately, homonationalism reveals itself to be a political strategy of the state that exists to cultivate life for some queer people, while ignoring or abandoning others, including LGBTQ refugees.

#### 1.3.2 Intersectionality

##### 1.3.2.1 Tracing Intersectionality: From its origins to this thesis

Intersectionality as a concept and method has become commonplace in diverse fields, from legal scholarship to health research to government policy and elsewhere. This widespread adoption is part of the reason for its use as a theoretical framework in this thesis. Indeed, it is difficult to *get out from under* intersectionality, and nearly impossible to describe axes of power and discrimination without at least referring to the concept. That said, in order to understand intersectionality properly—its meaning and its application—we must return to the origins of the concept.

The term intersectionality was first coined in Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 1989 paper “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. In this original



conceptualization, intersectionality was developed to articulate the experiences of Black women in the United States, as their unique experiences of marginalization were often overlooked in legal doctrine. However, as Crenshaw (1989) herself points out, the desire and need to articulate these experiences of compounding oppression did not originate with her. She points to the landmark speech by Sojourner Truth “Ain’t I a Woman”—first published in 1863—as evidence of Black women’s long-standing commitment to describing their unique experiences of marginalization and oppression, rooted in both their Blackness and womanhood.

Nonetheless, in 1989 the term ‘intersectionality’ was an important and ground-breaking addition to a growing conversation surrounding the ways in which systems of power intersect to produce specific outcomes. Crenshaw’s analysis of how patriarchy and white supremacy intersect to marginalize Black women in the legal sphere and beyond shone a new light on the machinations of power in the United States. As pointed out by Carbado et al. (2013):

[Crenshaw] exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations (e.g., law); and at the same time, she placed into sharp relief how discourses of resistance (e.g., feminism and antiracism) could themselves function as sites that produced and legitimized marginalization (p. 304).

In her 1991 follow-up essay entitled “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, Crenshaw elaborated on the concept of intersectionality and how and where it could be applied. In this piece, she expanded her focus beyond the lives and experiences of Black women to include all women of colour, and analyzed how systems of oppression functioned in social movements and service provision within the non-profit sector as opposed to case law. This essay rendered a broader application of Intersectionality possible, demonstrating its application to fields outside of law.

Indeed, since these two landmark essays, intersectionality has been applied to a “range of issues, social identities, power dynamics, legal and political systems, and discursive structures” (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 304). This thesis applies intersectionality

to the experiences of LGBTQ refugees within Alberta's housing system. It employs intersectionality to examine the ways in which systems of power and oppression—such as capitalism and the commodification of housing, xenophobia, racism and heteropatriarchy—function together to produce unique challenges and outcomes for LGBTQ refugees. While queerness and refugee status are identified in the *NHS* as sites of vulnerability, this thesis takes these sites as a point of departure, expanding its analysis to include multiple systems of power that extend beyond Canada's immigration system and homo-, bi-, and transphobia. Factors such as racialization, socioeconomic class, and housing commodification are also considered, as all of these intersecting systems and identities come to bear on the lives of LGBTQ refugees in Canada. In so doing, this thesis contributes to the development of intersectionality as a 'work in progress', as "we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places" (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 305). That said, to understand how intersectionality got *here* (that is, to this thesis and cultural moment) the two key source texts need to be further unpacked and explored.

### **1.3.2.2 What is Intersectionality?**

In this section, I examine primary concepts from Crenshaw's two foundational texts, which will be referred to as 'Demarginalizing' and 'Mapping', respectively. While both texts are indispensable to understanding the concept of intersectionality, more attention will be paid to 'Demarginalizing' due to its applications to legal and policy analysis—one method employed in this thesis—and because it was the text in which the term was first developed. That said, the ways in which 'Mapping' expands the scope of intersectionality will also be thoroughly unpacked.

#### *Demarginalizing*

As noted above, intersectionality was developed in order to articulate the unique experiences of Black women in the United States, with reference to the ways in which their Blackness and womanhood intersected to produce distinct experiences of

oppression that had yet to be considered within legal doctrine. Indeed, Crenshaw (1989) takes the lives of Black women as the point of departure for her analysis, as it was “apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (p. 140). According to Crenshaw, the ways in which race- and gender-based oppression can compound to produce specific instances of discrimination is frequently not considered, leaving the marginalization of Black women completely unintelligible within law.

Crenshaw (1989) goes on to state that “in race-discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex-discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women” (p. 140). In other words, Black women could only be discriminated against as *Black* women (wherein their experiences were assumed to be the same as Black men) or as *Black women* (wherein their experiences were assumed to be the same as white women). We see this kind of thinking rearing its head in housing research and policy as well, wherein the experiences of LGBTQ people in housing are well-researched, as well as the experiences of (presumably) cisgender and heterosexual refugees, but the experiences of LGBTQ refugees are barely researched at all, and therefore rendered unimaginable. Much like with Black women, the failure to see the intersection of these two identity categories means that the unique needs of LGBTQ refugees cannot be adequately addressed.

Crenshaw (1989) goes on to illustrate her point about single category analysis in law with reference to the famous case *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors (1976)*, wherein five Black women brought a case against General Motors alleging discrimination within the company’s seniority system. According to the evidence brought forth at trial, “General Motors simply did not hire Black women prior to 1964 and that all the Black women hired after 1970 lost their jobs in a seniority-based layoff during the subsequent recession” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141). However, the Court rejected the plaintiffs’ claim as “this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both” (cited in Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141).

In other words, the Court refused to consider that Black women may be discriminated against because they are *Black women*, who experience the compounding effects of racism and sexism simultaneously. The plaintiffs responded that making a purely race-based or sex-based claim would be inappropriate, as they were alleging race *and* sex discrimination, but the Court continued to refuse to accept this position. As Crenshaw (1989) points out:

[t]he court's refusal in *DeGraffenreid* to acknowledge that Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine were defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences (pp. 142-143).

Put simply, in *DeGraffenreid*, the Court refused to think intersectionally. In housing research and policy, a similar lack of intersectional thinking can take place. The experiences of refugees within the housing sector are assumed to be defined solely by cisgender and heterosexual refugees, while the experiences of LGBTQ people within housing are 'knowable' with reference only to those of LGBTQ citizens. Intersectionality is an important theoretical framework for understanding the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees, as it allows us to understand queerness and migration status as equally important and influential in shaping the lives of LGBTQ refugees. This starkly contrasts with how vulnerability is engaged in the *NHS*, wherein the intersections of the 12 vulnerable groups it identifies are not adequately considered.

### *Mapping*

In her 1991 follow-up paper, Crenshaw seeks to expand the purview of intersectionality beyond the lives of Black women exclusively, in order to theorize the lives and experiences of all women of colour. In this piece, Crenshaw (1991) remains critical of single category analysis, stating that "when practices expound identity as women or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (p. 1242). Indeed, the ability to 'tell' or to articulate the unique experiences of individuals positioned on multiple axes of oppression and domination is intersectionality's strength as a theory and method.

Crenshaw (1991) focuses on violence against women in order to understand how “the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism” (pp. 1242-1244). Rather than focusing on the shortcomings of legal doctrine, in this essay Crenshaw articulates the ways in which social movements can fail women of colour by not engaging in a multi-category or intersectional analysis.

In ‘Mapping’, Crenshaw introduces her readers to three types of intersectionality: Structural, Political, and Representational. Structural intersectionality is the way in which disadvantage manifests through structural inequalities, such as childcare responsibilities or immigration status. Political intersectionality “highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1251-1252). Finally, representational intersectionality describes the ways in which the cultural image of women of colour is influenced by “prevalent narratives of race and gender” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). While these disparate forms of intersectionality are not employed within this thesis, they are important to understanding the development of the concept, as well as the ways in which its application was expanded beyond case law to other domains, opening up the possibilities for future application and analysis.

Importantly, Crenshaw acknowledged that intersectionality is not a totalizing theory of identity and oppression, nor is it the only way that we should make sense of the experiences of women of colour. Rather, intersectionality should serve to emphasize “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245). What renders this essay so valuable to our developing understanding of intersectionality, and to this thesis, is the ways in which it expands the scope of Intersectionality to multiple categories of identity and multiple sites of analysis. It is through this expansion of her initial theory that intersectionality becomes applicable to a broader range of fields and groups, including, e.g., LGBTQ refugees. The ways in which this expanded understanding of intersectionality is important to this thesis will be described below.

### 1.3.2.3 What does this mean for housing research?: Intersectionality, the *NHS*, and this thesis

It is important to note that this thesis is not the first time that intersectionality has been applied to housing research and housing policy; nor will it be the last. Intersectionality arrived in the field long before I did and shows up in many different areas, including in the *National Housing Strategy*. Indeed, the *NHS* employs a GBA+ approach to housing, a mode of analysis that seeks to consider multiple identity categories when evaluating policy. According to the *NHS*, “[t]he National Housing Strategy is grounded in, and supportive of, the Government’s commitment to GBA+ to ensure that programs will not negatively impact Canadians on the basis of gender and other identity factors” (p. 24).

Through application of intersectionality as a theoretical framework, I seek to understand the housing needs and experiences of LGBTQ refugees, an under-researched group in the housing sector. However, I also seek to evaluate the extent to which intersectionality has been successfully applied within existing housing policy documents. Finally, intersectionality will guide my analysis and recommendations vis-à-vis the housing needs of LGBTQ refugees, so we may, in the words of Crenshaw (1989): “facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: ‘When they enter, we all enter’” (p. 167).

## 1.4 Researcher Standpoint

I come to this research as a white, queer, settler woman living and working in Amiskwaciy Waskahikan, otherwise known as Edmonton, Alberta. I also come to this researcher as someone committed to broader socialist and feminist projects, the goals of which include the unconditional provision of adequate housing for all people everywhere. My standpoint as a socialist, feminist researcher who seeks to contribute to the realization of a meaningful right to housing has led me to undertake intersectionality-based research. This engagement with intersectionality will allow me to identify the ways in which systems such as white supremacy, settler-colonialism, capitalism, and

heteropatriarchy all work to potentially exclude certain populations from accessing the housing to which they are entitled. It will also help me in identifying nuanced solutions to this exclusion. My engagement with this topic comes from a desire to build solidarity with other members of the queer community, as well as expand access housing in Canada, and it is important that my axiology reflects this desire.

### 1.5 Roadmap

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 includes reviews of relevant literature, including scholarship on the housing experiences of LGBTQ2 people and refugees, respectively, as well as the human right to housing. Chapter 3 describes the methods employed in this research (policy analysis and key-informant interviews), why they were chosen, and why they were appropriate. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this research, which will be discussed in light of theoretical frameworks presented and literature discussed earlier. Finally, this thesis closes with Chapter 5, wherein a summary of the thesis is provided, and recommendations to improve the housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees are explored.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The *National Housing Strategy (NHS)* identifies LGBTQ2 people as one of the twelve ‘vulnerable groups’ that experience barriers to finding and maintaining adequate housing in Canada (Canada, 2017). In addition to LGBTQ2 people, the NHS also names survivors of family violence; newcomers to Canada; seniors; people with disabilities; people living with mental health and addiction issues; veterans; Indigenous peoples; young adults; racialized groups; and individuals and families experiencing homelessness as vulnerable groups within the Canadian housing sector (Canada, 2017). While the *NHS* identifies LGBTQ2 people as a group that experiences housing vulnerability, it does not meaningfully interrogate *why* LGBTQ2 people are vulnerable in the Canadian housing sector, the nature of that vulnerability, or *who* renders LGBTQ2 people a vulnerable group.

The nature of LGBTQ2 people’s vulnerability in the Canadian housing sector will be further unpacked in this thesis. It will detail how different members of the LGBTQ2 community, including refugees, experience vulnerability in housing in different ways. It will also interrogate the extent to which international and Canadian human rights law are able to mitigate the vulnerabilities of LGBTQ2 people in housing. It is important to note, however, that LGBTQ2 people are not inherently vulnerable. Rather, they are made vulnerable through systems of homo-, bi-, and transphobia, as well as the commodification of housing under capitalism. These systems, as well as the impacts they have on the lives of LGBTQ2 people, will be further explored in this thesis.

### 2.1 Vulnerability

It is crucial that we examine the concept of vulnerability, as it is through this lens that the *NHS* understands LGBTQ2 people’s and newcomers’ housing experiences and prioritizes actions that increase their access to “housing that meets their needs and is affordable” (Canada, 2017, p. 9). The *NHS* (correctly) identifies both LGBTQ2 people and newcomers to Canada as vulnerable groups that are “marginalised” or “in a disadvantaged position” when it comes to securing safe, stable, and affordable housing (Canada, 2017, p. 9). LGBTQ2 people and newcomers are therefore deemed an area of



priority, along with other vulnerable groups. However, the nature of LGBTQ2 people's or newcomers' vulnerability—how it is constructed, why it is constructed, and by whom—is never outlined in the *NHS*. Failure to interrogate this vulnerability leaves the forces that have brought it into being comfortably intact. Consequently, the nature of LGBTQ2 people's and newcomers' vulnerability will be unpacked below.

In discussions of vulnerability, it is important to note that vulnerability is *created* and *imposed*, and that it is not intrinsic to LGBTQ2 people's or newcomers' existence. This distinction is vital, as “vulnerability is predominately understood as feminising and subsequently as negative, scary, shameful, and above all something to be avoided and protected against” (Dahl, 2016, p. 41). Understandings of vulnerability as an inherent condition of LGBTQ2 people and newcomers marks them as people born into perpetual failure and hardship. To perceive LGBTQ2 people or newcomers—as well as the other groups identified as vulnerable by the *NHS*— as *inherently* vulnerable is to ignore the ways in which these groups have been victimized by histories of discrimination, structural inequalities, and failed housing policy.

As mentioned above, the conditions of vulnerability for LGBTQ2 people and newcomers are manufactured, resulting from an “exposure to contingencies and stress” that exceeds their ability to cope (Chambers, 1989, p. 1). These vulnerabilities include both ‘external’ stressors, such as the “risks, shocks, and stress to which an individual or household is subject”, as well as ‘internal’ stressors, which include “defencelessness” and an inability to “cope without damaging loss” (Chambers, 1989, p. 1). For example, an external stressor faced by many LGBTQ2 people is homelessness. The resulting internal stressors could include mental health or substance abuse issues. The exposure of LGBTQ2 people to these contingencies and stressors are the result of a failure of the housing system, as being unstably housed creates and exacerbates the vulnerabilities experienced by many LGBTQ2 people. As such, vulnerability should not be understood as “just a trait or an episodic disposition of a discrete body” (Butler, 2015, p. 130), and should instead be understood as an act of wounding. This wounding is “an act that might be quite willfully inflicted on one agent by another or an outcome from carelessness on the part of one agent in their dealings with another” (Philo, 2005, p. 442). These agents may include individual actors (such as a landlord who directly

discriminates against LGBTQ2 people or newcomers) but can also include government agencies that fail to provide adequate housing for LGBTQ2 people or newcomers to Canada. Consequently, the wounding that Philo describes can be perpetrated *directly* on an individual level (between a landlord and a tenant) or *indirectly* on a systemic level (through state negligence).

This is to say that the vulnerability experienced by LGBTQ2 people and newcomers is created and perpetuated by “interconnected geographies (and histories)” (Philo, 2005, p. 42), a result of the contexts and spaces that LGBTQ2 people and newcomers are pushed into (or pushed out of). In thinking through the concept of vulnerability, it is vital that we remember that LGBTQ2 people and newcomers are not simply ‘vulnerable’, but rather, that they are ‘vulnerable to’ myriad conditions that emerge from “their social and economic condition” (Waite, 2009, p. 421); one that is informed by structural homo-, bi-, and transphobia, a fluctuating economy, and systems that provide inadequate support to those in need. In the following discussion of sites of vulnerability in housing, it is important to remember that LGBTQ2 people and newcomers may become vulnerable *to* experiences such as homelessness, substance abuse, and economic precarity (to name a few) due to systemic oppression and inadequate social supports, and that these vulnerabilities can be mitigated when they are able to access affordable, safe, and stable housing.

## 2.2 Sites of Vulnerability for LGBTQ2 people

One significant barrier for obtaining housing for LGBTQ2 people is **discrimination in housing**, as homo-, bi- and transphobia directly impact their ability to obtain and retain stable housing. For example, according to one study conducted in Vancouver, BC, many queer women report more difficulty in finding housing with their female partners than with previous male partners and will often ‘closet’ themselves in order to avoid this issue (Lyons et al., 2019). Queer women describe passing off their partners as roommates or as family members in order to avoid discrimination or choosing to live alone rather than having their sexual orientations called into question (Lyons et al., 2019, p. 9). While this strategic closeting made these women successful in obtaining

housing, it often came at the expense of their own well-being, as LGBTQ2 people with lower levels of “sexual orientation disclosure” are more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety (Lyons et al., 2019, p. 10).

According to research conducted in the United States, transgender individuals experience alarmingly high levels of discrimination in housing. Overall, 19% of transgender people report being denied housing due to their trans identity, and 11% of transgender people describe being evicted from housing on that basis (Kattari et al., 2016, p. 429). In Canada, racialized trans people are even more likely to report having faced discrimination in the private rental market, involving racial discrimination in addition to transphobic discrimination (Abramovich & Kimura, 2019, p. 7). While transgender people certainly face the highest levels of discrimination in both housing and employment, cisgender LGBQ individuals also face a significant amount of housing discrimination, with 17.7% of gay men in the United States reporting experiences of housing discrimination, compared to 16.3% for lesbians, 3.7% for bisexual men, and 6.8% for bisexual women (Kattari et al., 2016, p. 429). This means that many LGBTQ2 people struggle to access housing in the private rental market or may have to return to the closet in order to do so.

Homelessness is perhaps the most pressing concern when it comes to LGBTQ2 vulnerability in housing. LGBTQ2 people—and LGBTQ2 youth in particular—are vastly overrepresented in the homeless population, with anywhere between 15-40% of homeless youth identifying as transgender or as non-heterosexual (Frederick, 2014, p. 474). This is because many LGBTQ2 people experience multiple risk factors for homelessness at once, including “family conflict, bullying, mental health problems, drug and alcohol use, and physical and sexual abuse” (Frederick, 2014, p. 475). It is important to note that these risk factors are often a direct result of homo-, bi-, and transphobia. Many LGBTQ2 youth report leaving home under threat of violence from family members. Two youths interviewed in Alex Abramovich’s (2014) “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer, and Restless” report stated that their fathers made death threats against them following their coming-out, causing them to flee their homes (pp. 387 & 390). While the risk factors described above often lead to homelessness, homelessness itself also creates and exacerbates vulnerabilities in LGBTQ2 youth, in

the areas of mental health, suicidal behaviour, substance use, sexual and physical victimization, sexual risk-taking, as well as in discrimination on the basis of sexuality (Matthews et al., 2018, p. 234).

LGBTQ2 people are particularly vulnerable to street homelessness because they are largely **unable to access temporary shelters** due to pervasive homo-, bi- and transphobia within the shelter system. For example, they are sometimes singled out for violence within shelter. One frontline worker at Turning Point—a shelter in Toronto, Ontario—describes a gay youth being subject to a “pretty brutal beating” in their facility due to his sexual orientation (as cited in Abramovich, 2014, p. 393). Such incidents are sometimes ignored or overlooked by shelter staff “who are too exhausted to intervene” (Abramovich, 2014, p. 393). Moreover, binary and cissexist understandings of gender mean that trans and gender non-conforming people cannot safely or comfortably access shelters, particularly if these shelters are segregated by gender. Dorms in many shelters are divided into men’s and women’s dormitories, or cater exclusively to one gender, with no policies in place to accommodate individuals who do not fit neatly into binary categorizations of male and female (Frederick, 2014, p. 489).

This is particularly problematic for transgender individuals, whose bodies and genders are often seen as incongruent due to transphobic understandings of gender and sex. This issue is perhaps best illustrated by the arrest of a trans woman in post-Katrina New Orleans, who spent four days in jail for taking a shower in a ‘women’s-only’ emergency shelter (Gorman-Murray et al., 2015, p. 250). Trans individuals are also more likely to experience violence within the shelter system. A participant interviewed in Denomme-Welch et al.’s (2008) “Invisible Men: FTM and Homelessness in Toronto” describes avoiding men’s shelters altogether, because “there’s a chance that [he] might get raped or beat up there if [he] use[s] the washroom” (p. 36). Additionally, transgender people often report being misgendered, experiencing differential or discriminatory treatment, as well as fearing for their personal safety while trying to access temporary shelter (Connery, 2014, p. 68). Due to the criminalization and marginalization of non-normative gender identities and sexualities, LGBTQ2 people often give up on accessing temporary shelter altogether, living and sleeping outdoors instead. Due to the alarmingly high rates of LGBTQ2 homelessness, as well as the

inability of many LGBTQ2 people to access temporary shelter, it is imperative that alternatives (such as permanent supportive housing) are in place to mitigate the enormous amount of suffering experienced by this population.

LGBTQ2 people's distrust of the shelter system can connect with **general distrust of social supports**, manifest in an unwillingness to access resources, policing, or mental health services due to fear of violence and discrimination. This fear is particularly acute for queer youth, as many social services are only available to people over a certain age (typically 16-18 years), with younger LGBTQ2 people often being returned to potentially homo- and transphobic families, group homes, or foster care placements instead (Frederick, 2014, p. 480). In order to avoid this, queer youth will rely on informal, and largely inadequate, networks of support. Moreover, despite experiencing extremely high rates of sexual and physical assault, LGBTQ2 people may avoid police services due to pervasive homo-, bi-, and transphobia within the police force, as well as the fear of being revictimized by police (Guadalupe-Diaz & Jasinski, 2016, p. 4). These fears may be particularly acute for Indigenous LGBTQ2 people, as they are disproportionately targeted by police, as well as overrepresented in Canada's prisons (Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2021). It is important to note that these fears are neither irrational nor unwarranted, as LGBTQ2 people often experience discrimination by police officers (Guadalupe-Diaz & Jasinski, 2016, p. 14).

Additionally, despite high rates of mental health issues, substance use disorders, and suicidal ideation among LGBTQ2 people, they are less likely to access mental health services than their heterosexual counterparts due to fears of pathologization and discrimination. LGBTQ2 people can experience the mental health system as "controlling and oppressive" as LGBTQ2 identities are still understood by some as deviant, with the system generating "stigmatizing labels" such as Gender Identity Disorder (Frederick, 2014, p. 490). While it is important that social supports and health systems be reformed to ensure they are welcoming of LGBTQ2 people, such reform is not in itself a substitute for the provision of adequate and stable housing. Additionally, it is vital that this housing is designed in such a way that LGBTQ2 people are able to trust the system and the people working within it, so they will not be deterred from access.

Another significant site of vulnerability for LGBTQ2 people is **economic precarity and workplace discrimination**. The economic precarity of LGBTQ2 youth is related to the high rates of homelessness, as homeless youth are far less likely to have a high school education and previous work experience, making finding a job very difficult (Frederick, 2014, p. 477). Additionally, according to a study conducted across Canada, the conditions of homelessness make securing legal work more difficult, as homeless queer youth—and homeless people generally—may not have a home address to put on job applications, work-appropriate clothing, or government identification (Karabanow et al., 2010, p. 54). Homeless youth are also more likely to suffer from inadequate nutrition and sleep, as well as from extreme stress, making maintaining a job quite difficult if they are able to secure one (Frederick, 2014, p. 478). Due to these barriers to finding and maintaining legal work, homeless queer youth often engage in sex work to earn money, resources (such as food or clothing), or shelter. Gay and bisexual men, for example, are significantly more likely to engage in survival sex than their heterosexual counterparts (Walls & Bell, 2011, p. 425).

LGBTQ2 people can also experience unemployment due to homo-, bi- and transphobia. While 25.1% of cisgender LGBTQ people report workplace discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientations, 50% of transgender people report workplace discrimination on the basis of their gender identity (Kattari et al., 2016, p. 437). This discrimination is often compounded by racism, as the unemployment rate of transgender people of colour is four times as high as that of the general population, and twice as high as that of white transgender people (Kattari et al., 2016, p. 432). Due to pervasive workplace discrimination, LGBTQ2 people are often denied employment, or must quit their jobs due to the insufferable conditions of many work environments. These barriers to obtaining and maintaining work can lead to experiences of economic precarity and poverty, which makes finding a home in the private rental market all the more difficult.

As briefly touched on earlier, LGBTQ2 people face **high rates of victimization**, and are more likely to be targeted for physical and sexual assault than their heterosexual counterparts. This is often the case in romantic partnerships, as LGBTQ2 people face alarmingly high rates of intimate partner violence (Guadalupe-Diaz &

Jasinski, 2016). Systemic oppression functions as the scaffolding for such violence, wherein “homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia structurally disadvantage LGBT victims and also foster opportunities for abuse to rely on that power structure” (Guadalupe-Diaz & Jasinski, 2016, p. 2). Systemic oppression structurally disadvantages LGBTQ2 survivors, as pervasive homo-, bi- and transphobia within the shelter system and policing limit pathways out of abuse. Additionally, abusers frequently rely on and exploit feelings of internalized homo-, bi- and transphobia in their victims in order to keep them in abusive relationships; they use negative stereotypes about LGBTQ2 people in order to convince their victims that they are unlovable, and therefore unable to find another romantic partner.

This is why it is of vital importance that LGBTQ2 people are able to access social and affordable housing, because without access to shelters, help from law enforcement, or the resources to secure housing in the private rental market, LGBTQ2 survivors of abuse are often left with nowhere else to turn. Moreover, a study conducted by Petering et al. (2019) demonstrated that rates of physical assault among LGBTQ2 decreased after they accessed social housing. This is likely because being stably housed reduced their exposure to perpetrators of violence, and because it enabled them to spend less time on the street in “high-risk neighborhoods” (Petering et al., 2019, p. 6). While rates of assault decreased, they remained high overall, speaking to the need for other methods of intervention, in addition stable housing for LGBTQ2 people.

As discussed above, LGBTQ2 people are far more likely experience **mental health-related issues** than their heterosexual peers, including substance use disorders, depression and anxiety, and suicidal ideation. These mental health-related issues can be partially attributed to homophobia and the societal rejection of queer people, factors that have been found to have a “have a significant psychological impact” (Frederick, 2014, p. 475). Moreover, existing mental health issues are worsened by the conditions of homelessness, with homeless LGBTQ2 people experiencing higher rates of both suicidal ideation and substance use (Matthews et al., 2018). Queer women in particular face a number of mental health-related issues, reporting higher rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts than heterosexual women, which may correlate with the high levels of sexual and physical abuse experienced by queer

women (Lyons et al., 2019, p. 2). The mental health issues experienced by LGBTQ2 people should be of particular concern to those working in the housing sector, as homelessness exacerbates mental health issues, while the presence of mental health disorders makes exiting homelessness and sustaining housing more difficult (Ecker et al., 2018, p. 305).

LGBTQ2 people are also more likely to suffer from substance use disorders than their heterosexual counterparts. This can be partially attributed to the culture of drug and alcohol use in LGBTQ2 communities, and to alcohol and other drugs being used by queer folks in order “to escape or avoid experiences of sexual minority stress such as family rejection, stigma, and discrimination” (Mericle et al., 2019, p. 793). A 2018 study of methamphetamine use among men who have sex with men (MSM) found a direct correlation between drug use and unstable housing, positing that “methamphetamine is commonly used in the context of unstable housing as a means of survival or emotional coping” (Li et al., 2018, p. 183). The stress of being unstably housed can be unbearable, and many LGBTQ2 people in this situation turn to alcohol and other drugs in order to cope (Glick et al., 2019, p. 755). In examining the ways in which both mental health issues and substance use disorders worsen in the context of unstable housing, it becomes clear that social and affordable housing *must* be accessible to LGBTQ2 people, as a lack of adequate housing propels vulnerable members of this population towards suffering and death.

Another significant health concern for those in the LGBTQ2 community is HIV/AIDS. Queer people generally—and low-income queer people in particular—face significant risk for HIV transmission. This is largely because impoverished LGBTQ2 people are more likely to rely on sex trade work for their survival (Teengs & Travers, 2006, p. 18). Even subgroups within the LGBTQ2 community who are assumed to be of low risk for HIV infection, such as gay and bisexual women, remain vulnerable to HIV infection due to intravenous drug use, sex with men, and pervasive sexual violence (Logie et al., 2012, p. 1). That said, LGBTQ2 individuals living with HIV who were stably housed were found to have far better health-related outcomes than their homeless or unstably housed peers, as they were more likely to achieve viral suppression (Glick et al., 2019, p. 765), were less likely to engage in HIV-related risk taking behaviours, and



were more likely to adhere to anti-retroviral therapy (Ecker et al., 2018, p. 315). This evidence suggests that housing is a vital part of the healing process for LGBTQ2 populations.

The final site of vulnerability for LGBTQ2 people considered here is **old age**, as it is in later life that LGBTQ2 people are more likely to be in forms of housing with communal living. Many LGBTQ2 seniors express fear over the prospect of entering a facility where their sexual orientations and gender identities are not readily accepted and describe anxieties about being “unaccepted by other residents” (Sullivan, 2013, p. 235). Many seniors discussed friends who had to return to the closet in majority heterosexual facilities, friends who felt that they needed to hide their “true selves from their neighbors” and isolate themselves from others (Sullivan, 2013, p. 242). Additionally, these LGBTQ2 seniors expressed an unwillingness or inability to closet themselves at this stage of their lives (Sullivan, 2013, p. 242). These sentiments perhaps point to the need to offer social housing as an alternative to potentially homophobic congregate facilities, should these seniors have the ability to live independently. Moreover, they may indicate the value of LGBTQ2-specific (or, at the very least, LGBTQ2-affirming) housing.

While feelings of ‘home’ and ‘community’ are important for all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, they are especially meaningful for LGBTQ2 people, as they provide a respite from a broader society that is often hostile to queer existence. Queer homes and communities often operate “as a site, source, and process of resilience in heteronormative societies that are routinely discriminatory and potentially violent” (Gorman-Murray et al., 2015, p. 238). These spaces allow LGBTQ2 people to manage intrusion from the heterosexual and cisgender public, and allow for the collective or individual expression of marginalized sexual and gender identities (Gorman-Murray et al. 2015, p. 253). LGBTQ2-specific places, therefore, “have emotional and psychological importance as empowering places in a ‘straight’ world” (Hulko, 2018, p. 108). Moreover, LGBTQ2 youth living in LGBTQ2-specific housing reported feeling more confident in their gender and sexual identities than they did in other forms of housing, as well as a higher level of safety in their day-to-day lives

(Abramovich & Kimura, 2019). These findings point to importance of being housed in a space where people feel safe, in control and comfortable in expressing their identities.

Throughout their lifetimes, LGBTQ2 people can be faced with myriad vulnerabilities, including but not limited to the following: homelessness; inability to access temporary shelter; failure of multiple social systems; economic precarity; workplace discrimination; housing discrimination; high rates of physical and sexual victimization; health issues and dis/ability; and old age. These vulnerabilities are created through structural inequality, interpersonal violence, and policy failure—including the failure to provide adequate housing for LGBTQ2 people. All of the vulnerabilities mentioned above can be mitigated if LGBTQ2 people are able to access safe and affordable housing, particularly housing that affirms their identities. Such housing allows queer people to lead more fulfilling, comfortable, and secure lives, and should therefore be considered a first step on a long road towards LGBTQ2 equality.

### 2.3 'Gaybourhoods'

The *NHS* commits Canada to not only increasing the supply of safe and affordable housing, but doing so in accessible neighbourhoods. This does not only mean neighbourhoods that are accessible for those with physical disabilities—although this is certainly important—but also neighbourhoods which feature “housing that is fully integrated into the community—close to transit, close to work, and close to public services” (Canada, 2017, p. 4). For LGBTQ2 people, the notion of full integration into an accessible community may call to mind the ‘gaybourhood’ (otherwise known as the gay ghetto, gay village, and gay neighbourhood). The definitions for ‘gaybourhood’ are multiple, and often vary depending on who you ask. Sociologists and geographers tend to define a gaybourhood as a space with “a distinct geographic focal point” that can be easily pointed out by citizens of the city in which it is located, and is typically confined to one or two main streets (Ghaziani, 2014, p. 2). The gaybourhood must also possess a ‘unique culture’ created by the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people who reside within it, as well as commercial spaces to serve the needs of this population (Ghaziani, 2014, p. 2). These commercial spaces can range from services (such as nonprofits, HIV

treatment facilities, and community centres) to gay-owned bars, clubs, and bookstores (Ghaziani, 2014, p. 2). It is important to note that many of the nonprofits and HIV treatment facilities that have come to define gaybourhoods were founded during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. In cities like Toronto, funding from responsive provincial and federal governments was funnelled into the gay village to create and support services such as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), Casey House, and 519 Church Street; services that remain in Toronto's gay village to this day (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2015). Similarly, in the United States "queer communities...used gayborhoods to respond to the AIDS crisis" (Ghaziani, 2021, p. 100). Due to sustained political advocacy in gaybourhoods during the height of the crisis, infection rates were lowered in places like the Castro in San Francisco (Ghaziani, 2021, p. 101). Indeed, gaybourhoods not only provided queer people with community and culture, but with a site of political mobilization. These place-based characteristics were not only life-affirming, but in the 1980s, they were life-saving.

Gaybourhoods were sometimes defined as "cities within cities" wherein LGBT people could fulfill "a substantial share of their daily commercial needs" (Hess, 2019, p. 232). This definition was primarily employed by scholars in the 1960s and 1970s, before the businesses and services within gaybourhoods were eroded by capitalist expansion, and before LGBTQ2 people could frequent straight-owned business and services without fear of persecution (Hess, 2019, p. 232). According to Hess and Bitterman (2021), this included protection from harassment and persecution at the hands of the police, as gaybourhoods provided safety in numbers. This definition was employed before gaybourhoods had turned into cultural meccas for straight and queer patrons alike, and when their primary purpose was providing security and privacy to their residents who desperately needed respite from the broader homophobic society (Hess, 2019). The 'cities within cities' definition is now used less frequently due to the assimilation and acceptance of (some) queers into mainstream society. As queer people leave gaybourhoods for various reasons, and as LGBTQ2 populations become more diffuse, there is a trend towards gaybourhoods becoming 'less gay', while other neighbourhoods becoming increasingly gay over time. Nevertheless, there are still spaces where (by and large) LGBTQ2 people *do not* live, such as "quintessentially

suburban neighbourhoods” (Hess & Bitterman, 2021, p. 19). It is important to note that despite many spaces becoming more welcoming of LGBTQ2 people, there are nonetheless neighbourhoods that remain hostile or unwelcoming (whether overtly or implicitly) to LGBTQ2 people.

Although gaybourhoods are rarely defined as sites for political organizing, this is an important and enduring function. As noted by sociologist Amin Ghaziani (2014), gaybourhoods “provide a platform from which gays and lesbians can organize themselves as a voting bloc, if they seek to work within the system, or as a social movement, if they instead wish to rally against it” (p. 3). For example, the historic election of Harvey Milk—the first openly gay man to be elected to office in the state of California—can be partially attributed to political organizing within the Castro in San Francisco (Doan & Higgins, 2011, p. 8). After Dan White murdered Harvey Milk in 1978, the Castro once again became a site of political organizing for queer people. Following the acquittal of White for first degree murder in 1979, the LGBTQ2 community of San Francisco engaged in political protest known as the ‘White Night Riots’, expressing public outrage and grief over the murder of Milk, and the insensitivity and prejudice with which his death was treated (Ghaziani, 2021, p. 100). As such, gaybourhoods should not be defined exclusively as spaces where gay people live, work, and consume goods and services, but also as spaces where they express political agency.

Gentrification has played a role in the formation of gaybourhoods and in some cases, in their subsequent dissolution. Gaybourhoods were initially formed in the 1960s following the economic decline of many inner-city neighbourhoods. Due to disinvestment, gay people could afford to buy property in historically working-class neighborhoods, such as the Castro in San Francisco and Lakeview in Chicago (Gilroy, 2018, p. 5). As a result, the original working-class residents of these neighborhoods were “replaced or displaced” by a massive influx of LGBTQ2 people (Gilroy, 2018, p. 5). Upon their arrival, LGBTQ2 gentrifiers began to invest their modest capital into their homes and renovate them, ultimately ‘revitalizing’ neighborhoods that had previously been considered undesirable, and forming gaybourhoods in the process (Doan & Higgins, 2011, p. 9).

Today, many gaybourhoods first developed in the 1960s find themselves in a state of 'advanced gentrification' (Gilroy, 2018, p. 6). The refurbished homes and other amenities (e.g., bars, restaurants, bookstores, sex shops, etc.) brought about by gentrification have rendered gaybourhoods desirable for straight homeowners. As heterosexual people move into gaybourhoods, gay-owned businesses shutter (Gilroy, 2018), and low- and middle-income LGBTQ2 people are forced out of the neighbourhoods they once called home (Hess, 2019). This stage of 'advanced gentrification' is a vicious cycle; as more and more LGBTQ2 people are priced out of their homes, more and more gay-owned business close, meaning that "the institutions that rendered [gaybourhoods] meaningfully gay no longer exist" (Gilroy, 2018, p. 6). Moreover, the more 'mixed' gaybourhoods become, the more desirable they are to high-income straight people, meaning that the cost of living in gaybourhoods continues to rise (Hess, 2019). In this sense, gay people functioned as 'early' and 'intermediate gentrifiers'; their labour and capital rendered once undervalued neighbourhoods attractive to the wider heterosexual populous (Gilroy, 2018, p. 6), which turned gaybourhoods into the homonormative playgrounds they have now become.

While there is certainly a "dissonant fetish in the commodity of a home in a 'diverse' neighbourhood" (Cofield, 2021, p. 41), it is crucial not to focus exclusively or primarily on individuals or households when discussing the rapid gentrification of gaybourhoods. Indeed, it is the movement of capital, and the actions of those who move it (such as real estate developers), that is responsible for the ongoing gentrification of gaybourhoods. The businesses and culture that made gaybourhoods desirable for homeowners, as mentioned above, also made gaybourhoods desirable for investors, and "[t]he revaluation of urban land as a commodity for investors introduced tensions between the use value of queer neighbourhoods and the exchange value of those neighbourhoods for investors who could repurpose the land for higher value uses" (Cofield, 2021, p. 13). This commodification of land within gaybourhoods is to be expected in the context of "the relatively unhampered operation of the land and housing markets" (Smith, 1979, p. 538) wherein the value of gaybourhoods for investors is prioritized over the value of these spaces for the queer people who built and continued to live in these neighbourhoods. As such, when discussing the gentrification of

gaybourhoods, it is important to remember that gaybourhoods are becoming more diffuse not simply because queer people are choosing to live elsewhere, or because upwardly mobile straight people find them desirable, but also because investors saw gaybourhoods as places to extract profit.

That said, the stage of ‘advanced gentrification’ happened not only for economic reasons, but also for social and political ones. The rapidity of gentrification in gaybourhoods can be partially attributed to the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. For example, in New York City, as gay and bisexual men died of AIDS, heterosexual people began to take over their vacant homes, and these previously rent-controlled apartments shifted to market rates (Hess, 2019). As these apartments became more expensive to rent, their tenants tended to become higher-income straight people, as opposed to “members of the LGBT community, artists, or immigrants” who had once populated gaybourhoods (Hess, 2019, p. 232).

Gentrification can be traumatic for anyone who experiences it, as “[d]isplacement from home and neighborhood can be a shattering experience” (Marcuse cited in Slater, 2006, p. 747). The gentrification of gaybourhoods can be particularly devastating, however, because these spaces emerged out of a need to escape homo-, bi-, and transphobia, and were developed to serve the interests of the LGBTQ2 community. Moreover, it is the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ2 community who are likely to be displaced by gentrification. While select LGBTQ2 homeowners benefit from the rise in real estate values in gaybourhoods (Doan & Higgins, 2011, p. 9), low-income LGBTQ2 people who rent—and who arguably need the services and community offered by gaybourhoods the most—are the ones who are forced to leave as gaybourhoods gentrify (Doan & Higgins, 2011, p. 9).

There is also a gendered dimension to this issue: due to the feminization of poverty, lesbians and queer women are more likely to be forced out of gaybourhoods when rents increase (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2015, p. 95). The centres that served the needs of queer women and lesbians in the community often follow shortly thereafter (Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2015, p. 95). This is especially true for women engaged in street level sex work—both trans and cis—who are forced out of gaybourhoods not only

by increases in property value, but by the puritanical and homonormative sexual politics of the new heterosexual residents (Ross & Sullivan, 2012). This is also true for single mothers, who are sometimes lesbians and queer women, and who “tend to be on the lower end of the socio-economic scale due to gendered income disparities” (Fynes, 2013, p. 14). As more marginalized and precarious queer people are forced out of gaybourhoods over time, these spaces become increasingly hostile to queer people. Specifically, gaybourhoods become less hospitable to gay life and culture—particularly the lives of cultures that are less palatable to the straight public—and are instead transformed into “homonormative commercial street[s] for affluent gay people and heterosexual people to visit and enjoy” (Toland, 2017, p. 23).

The ongoing gentrification of gaybourhoods not only displaces gay residents, but neutralizes the possibility of queer organizing. This is demonstrated by the difficulties faced by queer community organizers in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). As the DTES gentrifies, venues that once hosted queer events close and relocate (Toland, 2017, p. 51). This renders it more difficult for community organizers to host events for the gay community and bring its members together. Moreover, displaced queer community members may not be able to drive or take transit into the neighbourhood to attend events that do manage to find acceptable venues (Toland, 2017, p. 51). This renders the hosting of queer events (e.g., dance parties, speed-dating nights, concerts and shows) financially prohibitive to organize, ultimately rendering the queer community in Vancouver more diffuse and disconnected (Toland, 2017, p. 51). The more difficult it becomes for the gay community to gather and socialize, the more difficult it is for queer people to organize around their collective interests.

One way to mitigate the devastating effects gentrification is having on gaybourhoods is to create and maintain social and affordable housing in these places. This will ensure that low-income queer people—people who desperately need the services and social ties located in gaybourhoods—will not be priced out of their homes. Measures should also be put in place to protect the ‘anchor institutions’ located in gaybourhoods (i.e., bars, bookstores, sex shops, etc.) as well as vital services such as HIV-testing facilities. This is necessary because “the survival of LGBT neighborhoods is contingent upon the continued presence of businesses that cater to the needs of the

community” (Doan & Higgins, 2011, p. 15). Gaybourhoods were originally developed so gay people could insulate themselves from societal homo-, bi-, and transphobia, and so they could form relationships, friendships, and community with other gay people. They could continue to serve this purpose if measures were put in place to stall and reverse the negative effects of gentrification on both residential and commercial property in these spaces.

That said, it is important to note that not all gaybourhoods have experienced the same cycle of development and decline. As noted by Nathaniel Lewis (2013), in his illuminating study of Ottawa’s gay village, some gaybourhoods are experiencing a ‘birth’ instead of a ‘death’. Lewis (2013) notes that the official designation of Bank Street in Ottawa as the city’s gay village in 2011 is “temporally out of line with trajectories of well-known Canadian gay villages such as Church-Wellesley (Toronto), and Le Village Gai (Montreal), which were designated as villages by the early 2000s and had roots in the gay liberation movements of the 1970s” (p. 1). While Toronto and Montreal followed the kind of neighbourhood trajectory described above, Ottawa’s history meant that its gaybourhood developed differently, and that its (ongoing) need for a gaybourhood differed as well.

Lewis (2013) describes Ottawa as a conservative government town. As many Ottawa residents worked for the federal government in the public service, queer people living in Ottawa were subjected to high standards of “professionalism, discretion, conservatism, and strict gender norms” (Lewis, 2013, p. 4). As such, queer socializing in the 1980s and 1990s tended to happen behind closed doors; taking place at dinner parties, fundraisers, or ‘straight’ bars, as opposed to businesses and bars within gaybourhoods, as was the case in other cities.

As Ottawa’s ‘gay scene’ differed significantly from other cities, so too did the development of its gaybourhood. While Lewis (2013) notes that gaybourhoods in many other cities now function as commercial districts, Ottawa’s fight for an official gaybourhood emerged from a collective desire for “safety and symbolic meaning [rather] than commercial visibility” (p. 7). Indeed, Lewis’ (2013) interview participants described persistent feelings of ‘fear and insecurity’ in Ottawa, despite its reputation as “the centre



of the ‘progressive’ Canadian state” (p. 6). Thus, Ottawa’s gaybourhood was developed due to historical and contemporary discrimination, and the desire for safety—not unlike the gaybourhoods of the 1970s, although five decades later. Lewis’ case study is an important reminder that while many gaybourhoods have followed similar trajectories—now finding themselves in a state of advanced gentrification and decline—their development is ultimately closely tied to a city’s historical and contemporary socio-political context, and gaybourhoods may therefore differ significantly in their trajectories and contemporary manifestations.

#### 2.4 Experiences of LGBTQ newcomers in the Canadian housing system

Despite the depth of research on the experiences of refugees in the housing system in Canada (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Ferguson & Ferguson, 2015; Francis & Hiebert, 2014) very little is known about the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in housing. Throughout the literature, the specific needs of LGBTQ refugees—as well as the hardships they suffer and overcome—are largely neglected. Extant research on the housing experiences of LGBTQ people more generally has demonstrated that they are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience homelessness and housing precarity. Therefore, we can assume the same is true for LGBTQ refugees. That said, we should not have to *assume* what kinds of barriers LGBTQ refugees experience in finding and maintaining adequate housing. It is important to determine exactly what these barriers are, and how researchers and policymakers can begin to address them in order to improve the lives and life chances of LGBTQ refugees.

Most of the research on the experiences of LGBTQ refugees are not focused on their experiences post-settlement, but rather, their experiences in gaining refugee status. In Canada, the experiences of LGBTQ refugees before the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) have received considerable attention. LGBTQ refugee claimants are referred to by the IRB as SOGIE claimants. The SOGIE acronym stands for Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and is used to refer to applicants “that do not conform to socially accepted norms in a particular cultural environment” and who may experience persecution on this basis (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2021).

Within this research, the IRB adjudication process has been critiqued by scholars for forcing refugees to 'prove' persecution on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity through the divulsion of trauma (Kahn & Alessi, 2018). In order to convince the IRB that their countries of origin are inhospitable, "LGBT refugees and asylum seekers...have reported psychological and physical abuse, blackmail, assault, shunning, corrective rape, forced heterosexual marriage and forced participation in conversion therapy" (Kahn & Alessi, 2018, p. 2). The adjudication process frequently demands that LGBTQ refugees revisit past experiences of sexual violence, the disclosure of which "sometimes contribute[s] to depression, anxiety, and suicidality" (Kahn & Alessi, 2018, p. 8). By design, the IRB adjudication process requires that LGBTQ refugees recount some of the most painful and terrifying moments of their lives. Following the adjudication, they are often left to deal with the heavy and distressing feelings that characterize the disclosure of trauma with little to no support.

In addition to the divulsion of trauma, the act of 'coming out' to the IRB is often experienced as traumatic in itself. To establish that they are being persecuted on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity, LGBTQ refugees must first prove their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to the adjudication board. As such, LGBTQ people are not only required repeatedly to 'come out' to adjudicators but are encouraged to do so in a way that renders them legible as a LGBTQ person according to Western understandings of queerness (Lee & Brotman, 2013, p. 166). In essence, LGBTQ refugees are often "compelled to display or perform stereotypical aspects of [their] identity" in order for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to be believed by adjudicators (Yoshino as cited in Lee & Brotman, 2013, p. 166). This is because IRB adjudicators often do not believe the sexual orientations of gender-conforming refugee claimants (i.e., masculine gay men and feminine lesbians) due to a conflation of gay and trans identity (Lee & Brotman, 2011). As such, gay male claimants may feel compelled to conform to stereotypes of gay men as flamboyant, while gay female claimants may conform to stereotypes of lesbians as 'butch' or masculine. This process can be both humiliating and degrading, as LGBTQ refugees are forced to repeatedly come out to a group of strangers who subject them to scrutiny and suspicion (Lee & Brotman, 2013, p. 68).

As the adjudication process is extremely strenuous, many LGBTQ refugees experience negative short-term and long-term health outcomes following their meeting with the IRB. Even when refugees were granted refugee status from the Board, many still “experienced a ‘crash’ in the immediate aftermath of the claims decision” (Kahn & Alessi, 2018, 11). Moreover, many LGBTQ claimants are not awarded refugee status after having gone through the traumatic adjudication process. For example, in a review of 60 cases, more than 35 had an issue with determining the credibility of the claim, and in 17 of these 25 cases, claimants were determined to not have an ‘authentic’ SOGIE identity (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2020). Unsuccessful claimants, having been required to produce concrete evidence of their sexual orientations and/or gender identities, may then be additionally vulnerable in other countries that provide little to no protection for LGBTQ people, as they have definitively stated their SOGIE status (Kahn & Alessi, 2018, p. 8-9).

Finally, the adjudication process does little to prepare LGBTQ refugees for the pervasive homo-, bi- and transphobia they may be subject to upon entering Canada. For example, one interview participant cited in Murray’s (2014) paper named Rene described his excitement at the prospect of dressing in drag in public now that he lived in Canada, assuming that this form of gender presentation would be readily accepted here. However, in the span of just a few months, Rene was stopped and aggressively questioned by police multiple times, as law enforcement assumed he was a sex worker (Murray, 2014). Rene was outraged to discover he was being “racially and transphobically stereotyped by police” (Murray, 2014, p. 28).

Rene’s story exemplifies the point that the criteria through which LGBTQ refugees claim status (i.e., discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender expression) are phenomena that remain common in Canada. That is to say, many LGBTQ refugees are led to believe that Canada is a ‘safe haven’ for LGBTQ people, only to be subject to homo-, bi-, and transphobic practices here. For example, according to section 8.5.5.1 of the *Chairperson’s Guidelines 9: Proceedings Before the IRB Involving Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression*, an LGBTQ minor can claim refugee status on the basis of “sexual and physical violence; forced medical procedures such as surgery, hormonal therapy, or sexual orientation conversion

interventions; or forced confinement”, despite the fact that these discriminatory practices continued to occur in Canada until very recently, as conversion therapy was only made illegal on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (Aiello, 2021). While it is important that LGBTQ minors are able to escape countries where the conditions of existence threaten their lives, it is equally important that they be protected from homo-, bi-, and transphobia (in its myriad manifestations) while living in Canada.

While previous research has focused on the experiences of LGBTQ refugees entering Canada, there is a dearth of information about their experiences during and after settlement, particularly in the housing system. Research on the experiences of immigrants in housing generally points to lower incomes as one of the key barriers in securing adequate housing. In 2013, for example, the majority of immigrants in Canada (63%) reported household incomes of less than \$30,000, with 15% reporting an annual income of less than \$10,000 (Akter et al., 2013). Among recent immigrants—those who had “obtained a landed immigrant or permanent resident status up to five years prior to a given census year” (Statistics Canada, 2017)— 57% reported annual incomes of less than \$10,000 (Akter et al., 2013,). This poverty is also racialized, as racialized immigrant communities suffer disproportionately in the homelessness and poverty crisis in Canada (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2015, p. 9).

Low incomes and inadequate social assistance—combined with the “losses from rental inventory...at the bottom end of the spectrum” (Francis & Hiebert, 2014, p. 66)—make it very hard for refugees to secure affordable housing. Due to high rates of employment discrimination and unemployment among LGBTQ people generally (Kattari et al., 2016), it is likely that LGBTQ refugees would also experience high rates of poverty, and have difficulty in finding and maintaining affordable housing. However, as the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in housing have been largely unexamined, it is impossible to know this for sure.

Due to high rates of poverty, many immigrants turn to informal economies in order to supplement their incomes. In fact, only one-third of all immigrant households reported being able to “fully cover their household expenses on income earned through formal employment” (Akter et al., 2013, p. 3). This may be at least partially attributed to

the inability or unwillingness of Canadian employers to recognize foreign credentials, as this is “one of the key barriers to employment for recent immigrants” (Tanaescu et al., 2009, p. 6). Proficiency in the English language was another barrier that immigrants faced in securing formal employment. Akter et al. (2013) reported that 71% of immigrants with high levels of English language proficiency were employed in the formal economy, including 45% employed full time. By contrast, among immigrants with ‘beginner level’ English, the formal employment rate was 28%, including just 12% employed full time.

When immigrants are able to enter into the formal economy, they experience extremely high rates of discrimination. For instance, 56% of all immigrants surveyed reported having experienced discrimination on prohibited grounds (i.e., race, gender, religious affiliation, disability, etc.) in the workplace (Akter et al., 2013). This discrimination was often characterized by “aggressive behaviour, physical assault, yelling, threats, or sexual harassment” (Akter et al., 2013, p. 3). The aforementioned discrimination could include homo-, bi-, and transphobia leveled against LGBTQ refugees, but this was not specified by researchers.

The barriers to employment experienced by refugees, as well as their participation in informal economies, is particularly troublesome, as “[e]mployment that provides a reasonable and progressive income is crucial to improving housing trajectories” (Carter & Osborne, 2009, p. 312). Securing affordable and adequate housing is a crucial component of the settlement process for refugees, as it provides them “a basis from which [to] look for jobs, language training, and other services they need to get established in their new country” (Carter & Osborne, 2009, p. 309). Unfortunately, the existing research indicates that refugees face substantial difficulty finding adequate housing. While they are eligible for social housing in the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, this resource remains largely inaccessible to them due to prohibitively long wait-times (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2015, p. 9; Kisson, 2015, p. 67). According to a Toronto-based study, due to the extremely limited supply of social housing units, refugees are frequently pushed into the private rental market, where they are met with high rents and low-quality units (Murdie, 2008, p. 3).

Refugees also experience general discrimination in housing. In a study in Vancouver, British Columbia, many participants reported that they were denied housing due to their status, as landlords often assumed that refugees have no jobs and no means of paying rent (Hiebert et al., 2009, pp. 8-9). Other refugees reported feeling that they were denied housing due to their family size (including the fact that they had children), their old age, their disability, their race, or because of their culture (Vink & Ball, 2017, p. 24). Throughout the research, however, the ways in which LGBTQ refugees may be targeted by homo-, bi-, and transphobic discrimination went unexamined. This is unfortunate, as it is very likely that LGBTQ refugees would experience discrimination in the private rental market, as LGBTQ people generally experience high rates of housing discrimination (Lyons et al., 2019; Kattari et al., 2016).

Due to the many barriers refugees face in finding and securing affordable housing, many live in a state of 'hidden homelessness'. This is to say that, although most refugees report having a roof over their heads, they often experience "[i]nadequate and substandard living conditions" (Hiebert et al., 2009, p. 10). This hidden homelessness frequently takes the form of living "in crowded conditions with extended family and social networks" (Wayland, 2007, p. 22) in the absence of other secure forms of housing. Oftentimes, refugees and immigrants move from one household to the next, 'couch surfing' between the homes of various friends and family as they are unable to afford a permanent residence of their own (Carter & Osborne, 2009, p. 321).

Unfortunately, there is currently no research that describes LGBTQ refugees' experiences of hidden homelessness. As LGBTQ people are often rejected from their families of origin due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, it is possible that they may not have the social networks required to maintain a roof over their heads. Moreover, if LGBTQ refugees are coming to Canada as GARs, it is possible that they may not know anyone here when they arrive, which would make it difficult for them to 'couch surf' between accommodations. As such, it is possible that LGBTQ2 refugees may experience absolute—as opposed to hidden—homelessness. However, very little research has been conducted on the small minority of refugees who sleep rough or use shelters, and the presence and experiences of LGBTQ refugees within this group are currently unknown.

## 2.5 Economic, Social and Cultural rights

Due to the vulnerabilities identified above, it is important to develop a legal framework through which to tackle these barriers. Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) rights seek to ensure an adequate standard of living for all people, including through the provision of safe, adequate and affordable housing. ESC rights are strongly embedded in international human rights law, but prior to the *National Housing Strategy Act* (2019) have had little purchase in Canadian domestic human rights frameworks. These frameworks have been more narrowly focused on preventing discrimination, including in housing. This section will briefly summarize the seven components that make up the right to housing on the international level and identify the freedoms and entitlements inherent to the right to housing. Next, it will unpack how the right to housing is intertwined with other ESC rights. Finally, it will examine the impetus placed on the realization of the right to housing, through both immediate and progressive actions, as well as the ways in which this realization may be stymied.

In 1994, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“ESC Committee”) laid out seven essential components that make up the right to housing. In order for the right to housing to be meaningfully realized, the ESC Committee stated that individuals must be afforded housing: with security of tenure (meaning that they could not be evicted without grounds); with adequate services and materials (such as heating, potable water, and lighting); that is affordable, and therefore does not compromise other basic needs; that is habitable, and does not threaten the safety of its occupants; that is accessible for individuals with disability or illness; that is located close to one’s job, school, etc.; and finally, that is culturally adequate (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991; Collins & Stout, 2020). In other words, the ESC Committee established that “the right to housing, should not be interpreted in a narrower restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one’s head...Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity” (General Comment No. 4, as cited in Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, 1991, p. 11).

The international right to housing is made up of freedoms and entitlements. For the right to be realized, individuals must be free from the threat of “forced evictions”; the “destruction of one’s home”; “forced interference with one’s home, privacy and family”; and finally, have the freedom to “choose one’s residence” and to move freely (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2009, p. 3). In addition to these freedoms, individuals are entitled to “[h]ousing, land and property restitution”; access to adequate housing that is free of discrimination; and, “[p]articipation in housing-related decision-making at the national and community levels” (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2009, p. 3). It is in the sixth component of the right to housing—the right to freedom from discrimination—where the international human rights framework most clearly intersects with the Canadian human rights framework.

The ESC Committee also recognized that the right to housing does not exist in a silo, but is fundamentally interconnected with other rights. For example, adequate housing is central to the realization of the right to vote and the right to work, and is related to rights to health and to privacy (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2009). Moreover, the right to housing is situated within a broader right to an adequate standard of living. As laid out by the ESC Committee, the realization of the right to housing must co-exist with the realization of the rights to food, clothing, and adequate medical care, and also includes the right “to the continuous improvements of living conditions” (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1991, n.p.).

Different kinds of ESC rights are implemented differently; rights that do not require significant resources are subject to immediate implementation, while rights that require resources and planning are subject to progressive realization. For example, as the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation requires no resources to implement, State Parties are compelled to act on this aspect of the right to housing immediately (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2008, p. 15). However, as many other aspects the right to housing require significant resources and planning, its implementation follows a different trajectory: that of progressive implementation. State Parties are required to “mak[ing] constant efforts to improve the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights” (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2008, p. 16). This means that State Parties must be always taking



tangible and targeted steps to realize the right to housing, including and especially “the adoption of legislative measures” (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2008, p. 16).

It is important to note that the right to housing, as interpreted by the ESC Committee, does not require States to “build housing for the entire population”, nor does it enable inadequately housed people to demand housing from the government (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2009, p. 6). Rather, “the right to adequate housing covers measures that are needed to prevent homelessness, prohibit forced evictions, address discrimination...[and] ensure security of tenure for all” (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2009, p. 6). From this perspective, the role of the state in respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to housing requires regulating the market, and intervening to correct market failures (e.g., in providing affordable housing). These measures are still of vital importance, including for LGBTQ2 people, who are more likely to be homeless than their heterosexual counterparts (Frederick, 2014), are sometimes evicted due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Kattari et al., 2016), and face persistent discrimination in housing (Lyons et al., 2019; Abramovich & Kimura, 2019).

However, the transformative potential of the right to housing is limited by the fact that the ESC Committee does not oblige State Parties to build more housing in order to realize the right to housing. While the expansion of the housing stock may not always be required to realize the right to housing, no direct duty to build social and affordable housing is imposed on State Parties, even where the existing stock of these housing types is inadequate to meet needs. In Edmonton, for example, there is a need for significantly more permanent supportive housing -- approximately 800 units as of 2017 (Homeward Trust, 2017). Although Canada and by extension provincial and municipal governments are indirectly required to address such shortfalls (i.e. in order to fulfil components of the right to housing, such as affordability and accessibility for individuals with disability or illness), they are not mandated to address them immediately through direct involvement in the construction and operation of new units. By failing to oblige State Parties to intervene directly in the provision of housing where necessary, the ESC Committee ultimately fails to imagine a world where non-market housing can be

significantly expanded to ensure true housing for all, let alone one where housing is de-commodified altogether. Rather, its goal—in essence—is to ensure that housing is made affordable and secure for as many people as possible. While this is surely laudable, the right to housing as conceived by the ESC Committee falls short of interrogating why and how people become homeless or are left inadequately housed, and the role capitalism plays in these outcomes.

## 2.6 Canadian law and housing as a human right

This section examines the Canadian legal context and the ways in which it may facilitate or impede the realization of housing as a human right. To begin, I summarize the human rights legislation for Canada’s four most populous provinces—Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec—examining the protections they offer to marginalized persons, particularly in the areas of housing and employment. Next, I examine the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (“*the Charter*”), focusing on Sections 7 and 15. Finally, I describe the *NHS Act*’s commitments to ending homelessness and realizing housing as a human right. While this report demonstrates the strength of the Canadian human rights law, it also questions the efficacy of this law, and the extent to which its goals have been accomplished.

At the provincial level, human rights provisions (variously Acts, codes and charters) establish rules around the provision of rental housing with respect to discrimination against actual or potential tenants. Under the *Alberta Human Rights Act, RSA 2000, c A25.5*, any manner of discrimination is explicitly prohibited, as the *Act* is predicated on the principle that all human beings are fundamentally equal, “without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation” (s2). These protections against discrimination extend to the housing system, as Section 4 of the *Act* prohibits the denial of any person or class of persons access to goods, services, accommodation, or facilities that are typically open to the public, especially if this person or class of persons falls under the protected grounds outlined above (s4).

Protections against discrimination are further strengthened by Section 5, which states that “[n]o person shall (a) deny to any person or class of persons the right to occupy as a tenant any commercial unit or self-contained dwelling unit that is advertised or otherwise in any way represented as being available for occupancy by a tenant” (s5(1)). Further, Section 5 explicitly states that it is unlawful to discriminate against any person with respect to tenancy who falls under the protected grounds outlined in the Preamble of the *Act* (s5(1)).

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* also prohibits discrimination in employment, as Section 7 states that “[n]o employer shall (a) refuse to employ or refuse to continue to employ any person, or (b) discriminate against any person with regard to employment or any term or condition of employment, because of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation of that person or any other person” (s5(1)). These prohibitions against discrimination in housing and employment should—at least in theory—ensure that no marginalized person is denied a job or a roof over their head simply because of who they are.

The *Human Rights Act [SBC 1984] Chapter 22* in British Columbia offers similar protections to the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, as it also prohibits the denial of services, accommodation, or tenancy because of “race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, or age” (s2(1)). That said, British Columbia differs from Alberta in the sense that it allows ‘discrimination’ in housing in select instances. For example, discrimination against able-bodied people is allowed in a residential rental unit that is intended exclusively for people with disabilities. British Columbia’s *Human Rights Act* also differs from the *Alberta Human Rights Act* in that it prohibits discrimination in employment against persons that have been convicted of a criminal offence that is unrelated to that employment (s8). This is a valuable addition, as it is very possible that persons against whom discrimination is prohibited under the protected grounds may also have a criminal record.

While Ontario's *Human Rights Code, RSO 1990, c H-19* offers similar protections as the *Acts* in Alberta and British Columbia—prohibiting discrimination on the basis of “race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability or the receipt of public assistance” (Preamble)—it differs in its reference to the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*, linking the struggle for human rights in Ontario with global fights for dignity and equality (Preamble). Ontario's *Human Rights Code* is also unique in that it explicitly recognizes harassment as a component of discrimination. Section 7.1 of the *Code* states that “[e]very person who occupies accommodation has a right to freedom of harassment because of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression by the landlord or agent of the landlord or by an occupant of the same building”. The *Code* goes on to prohibit harassment in the workplace, with Section 7.2 stating that all persons ought to be free from harassment from their employer or from another employee. These prohibitions against harassment capture and protect against the nuance and subtlety of discrimination, and offer a more fully-realized vision of what the advancement of human rights could look like across Canada.

Québec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, CQLR c C-12* (“the *Québec Charter*”) differs quite significantly from the legislation in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. *The Québec Charter* offers the same protections as Alberta and British Columbia's *Acts* and Ontario's *Code*, but also includes prohibitions against discrimination based on political convictions, language, and social condition under Section 10, extending human rights protections to even more aspects of personal and social identity. *The Québec Charter* is also singular in that it discusses human rights not in terms of personal liberty, but in terms of collective welfare; emphasizing the obligation the state has to its citizens, and the responsibility citizens have to one another. It states that “[t]he rights and freedoms of the human person are inseparable from the rights and freedoms of others and from the common well-being” (Preamble), reminding us that human liberation is a collective project. Moreover, *The Québec Charter* lends itself well to the realization of housing as a human right, as Chapter 1 states that “[e]very human being whose life is in peril has a right to assistance” (s2). Given the danger that comes

from sleeping rough and living in shelters or other precarious forms of housing, this section of *The Québec Charter* could be interpreted as calling for the unconditional provision of adequate housing. Section 45 bolsters this assertion, as it states that “[e]very person in need has a right, for himself and his family, to measures of financial assistance and to the social measures provided for by law, susceptible of ensuring such person an acceptable standard of living” (s45). This commitment to aiding each person and ensuring a certain standard of living could also be leveraged by scholars, policymakers, and activists to argue for universal access to adequate housing.

In addition to the human rights protections offered by each province, the federal *Charter* also protects marginalized citizens—at least in theory—from discrimination in housing and employment in the public sphere. Whereas the various human rights codes and acts at the provincial level protect against discrimination in both the private and public sectors, the *Charter* regulates only the actions of public agencies and the government (Hutchinson & Petter, 1988). Section 15 of the *Charter* is well-known for its discrimination prohibitions, stating that “[e]very individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability”. While Section 15 does not explicitly offer protections to LGBTQ2 persons, the 1995 Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in *Egan v. Canada* determined that sexual orientation is a prohibited grounds for discrimination. While Section 15 has been critical to the advancement of equality and dignity of all persons, the less cited Section 7 of the *Charter* also contributes to the realization of human rights in Canada. It states that “[e]veryone has the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice”. As a lack of adequate housing represents a deprivation of these rights, Section 7 can be taken in conjunction with Section 15 to argue for housing as a human right.

Whereas the above documents outline the human rights that safeguard against discrimination in housing, the 2019 *National Housing Strategy Act* outlines Canada’s commitment to the realization of housing as a human right. The *NHS Act* recognizes that “housing is essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to

building sustainable and inclusive communities as well as a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive” (Preamble)—making a strong case for the importance of adequate housing for all Canadians. The *NHS Act* also states that the Government of Canada will establish a long-term plan for housing that “recognizes the importance of housing in achieving social, economic, health and environmental goals”; centres the needs of those in greatest housing need first; and sets “national goals relating to housing and homelessness and identity related priorities, initiatives, timelines and desired outcomes”—all while consulting with people with lived experiences of housing need and homelessness (s5(2)(a-d)). Indeed, the *NHS Act* explicitly states that the Government of Canada “recognize[s] that the right to adequate housing is a fundamental right affirmed in international law” (s4(a)), and commits the Canadian government to “further the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (s4(d)). This commitment to the advancement of housing as a human right is admirable, and it is imperative that the goals outlined in the *NHS Act* be realized, lest the wellbeing and dignity of Canadians in housing need continue to be neglected.

A close examination of provincial human rights legislation, the *Charter* and the *NHS Act* reveal the high legal standard for how all Canadians ought to be treated. However, legislation remains functionally useless unless it is meaningfully enforced. Despite provincial and federal measures that prohibit discrimination and recognize the equality and dignity of all Canadians, marginalized people continue to experience discrimination in housing and employment, and are continually forced to sleep rough, use shelters, or live in inadequate or dangerous housing situations in the absence of better options. The question at the centre of conversations about human rights (including conversations about housing as a human right) should not be: *how can we reform and reword law to better serve the citizenry?* But rather, *how can existing law be implemented in such a way to ensure that human rights exist not only on paper, but in practice?*

## 2.7 Substantive Equality

Substantive equality can be understood as a mechanism through which law and policy can increase access to material resources, as it enables individuals to make positive claims of the law (Coker, 2000). By contrast, formal equality can be understood as a paradigm which sees government interference and the provision of material resources as an intrusion into individual liberties. In other words, substantive equality requires the state to take actions to ensure that the needs of citizens are met (otherwise known as the achievement of positive freedoms), instead of simply ensuring that the state does not infringe of the rights or liberties of individuals (the protection of negative freedoms). A move towards substantive equality can support the fulfillment of the right to housing more broadly, as it includes the “positive governmental obligations to provide benefits and protections that are necessary to ensure that everyone has access to food, clothing [and] shelter” (Brodsky & Day, 2002, p. 186).

Because substantive equality requires positive government obligation, it is seen as a means to address discrimination and disadvantage; it allows us to “approach inequality as a problem of structural power, which creates and perpetuates systems of privilege and disadvantage in society” (Smith, 2016, p. 75). This is because law and policy focused on the achievement of substantive equality advances *systemic solutions*. For example, instead of approaching issues such as housing deprivation or homelessness as individual problems that the state must not exacerbate, a policy focused on substantive equality seeks to meet the needs of improperly housed individuals through the provision of adequate housing.

Unfortunately, the Canadian state and its various provinces have not (historically) committed to a substantive equality approach, and instead implemented law and policy through a formal equality approach. The state’s approach to human rights (including the right to housing) has been largely “premised on a paradigm of human rights which envisages the state as a potential threat to liberty and equality” (Fredman, 2005, p. 166). We can see evidence of this in provincial and federal approaches to housing; characterized by ‘bare minimum’ interventions that failed to keep people adequately housed (i.e., low social assistance rates, social housing stock that fails to meet

demand). This is why a commitment to the protection of negative rights *alone*, through a narrow focus on a formal equality paradigm, produces “inadequate and often punitive social services and dramatic inequalities” (Coker, 2000, p. 1011).

Canada’s historical commitment to a formal equality approach contravened the normative framework for rights developed by the ESC Committee which outlines three types of international human rights obligations. Specifically, states are under obligation to “*respect* human rights by refraining from depriving a person of his/her rights”, to “*protect* human rights by taking measures to prevent others from depriving people of their rights” and finally “to *fulfill* human rights by actively putting in place social arrangements including social, economic and governance policies and organizations that ensure enjoyment of rights” (Vizard et al., 2011, p. 7). The ESC Committee argues that not only should formal equality be achieved (through respect and protection), but that states are required to provide the necessary resources to ensure substantive equality (through policies that fulfil positive rights). In the case of the human right to housing, this would require states to ensure universal access to safe, affordable and adequate housing. It is only through such a provision that substantive equality in Canada’s housing system can be achieved and Canada’s obligations under international law can be honoured.

The *Charter* is exemplary of Canada’s commitment to a formal equality paradigm. Indeed, various governments have argued that “the *Charter* is a negative rights instrument—a document of civil and political rights—which does not impose positive obligations on governments to assume a redistributive role” (Brodsky & Day, 2002, p. 185). Petter (2009) categorizes the *Charter* as a fundamentally liberal document for this reason, as it has been interpreted as protecting “traditional liberal values” focused on “repel[ling] attempts at government interference” (p. 81). To date, the ‘rights and freedoms’ the *Charter* has safeguarded have largely been formal or negative rights, and not more substantive rights such as the right to housing.

Indeed, the federal government—along with various provinces—effectively eroded the right to housing with choices made since the 1990s. Heffernan et al. (2015) contend that the housing crisis in Canada emerged during the 1990s as a direct result



of widescale public disinvestment in the housing system. They argue that the housing crisis “is a manufactured social problem that is the entirely predictable outcome of a series of active legislation and policy choices made by the federal and provincial governments” (Heffernan et al., 2015, p. 11). It was these policy choices—including previous liberal interpretations of the *Charter*—that the applicants in *Tanudjaja v. Canada* sought to challenge in order to secure a substantive right to housing in Canada.

*Tanudjaja v. Canada*—also sometimes referred to as *The Right to Housing case*—was brought forward in 2009 by four brave applicants (Jennifer Tanudjaja, Janice Arsenault, Ansar Mahmood, and Brian DuBordieu) as well as a housing advocacy non-profit (the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation). All applicants experienced various degrees of housing insecurity (including absolute homelessness) and believed that these experiences contravened sections 7 and 15 of *The Charter*. In essence, the claim rested on the assertion that, by failing to ensure access to adequate housing, the governments of Ontario and Canada were in violation of sections 7 and 15 of the *Charter*. They were in violation of s. 7 as “[t]he harm caused by Canada’s and Ontario’s failure to implement effective strategies to address homelessness and inadequate housing deprives the applicants and others similarly affected of life, liberty and security of the person” (para. 34 cited in *Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [50]). Furthermore, those governments were in violation of s. 15 of the *Charter* “by creating and sustaining conditions of inequality” (para. 34 cited in *Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [50]). The applicants also argued that persons experiencing homelessness or living in inadequate housing were disproportionately members of other groups protected under s. 15 of the *Charter* (such as women, Indigenous peoples, or racialized persons) and that the failure of Canada and Ontario to address homelessness and inadequate housing effectively constituted adverse effects discrimination under s. 15. It is important to note that the experiences of these four applicants reflected “the situations of hundreds of thousands of Canadians living in fear of eviction, living in homes that cannot accommodate disabilities and living in precarious housing with the attendant fear of homelessness” (Bullen, 2015, p. 4). This is to say that hundreds of thousands of Canadians had been failed by a formal equality approach to housing and *Charter* interpretation.

The claim leveled in *Tanudjaja v. Canada* was that federal and provincial governments had adopted housing policy that “predictably creates and sustains increasing widespread homelessness and inadequate housing” and failed to implement programs that would “effectively protect those who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness” (Heffernan et al., 2015, p. 23). This had taken the form of: “cancelling funding for the construction of new social housing”; “withdrawing from the administration of affordable rental housing”; downloading the responsibility for social and affordable housing onto municipalities; and “heightening insecurity of tenancy by creating administrative procedures to facilitate evictions” (Heffernan et al., 2015, p. 19). In light of this, the applicants argued that the federal and provincial governments had created the conditions of housing insecurity, in violation of sections 7 and 15 of the *Charter*. This case was initially dealt with in the Ontario Superior Court by Justice Lederer, who ruled that the case was non-justiciable. Next, the case moved to the Ontario Court of Appeal, where the majority opinion agreed with the decision made at the Superior Court, while Justice Feldman issued a dissenting opinion. Finally, the case moved to the Supreme Court of Canada, where the application for leave to appeal was dismissed.

The claim in *Tanudjaja* was struck down by Justice Lederer on the basis that the application could not succeed, as “[h]e found that the application disclosed no reasonable cause of action and was not justiciable” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [16]). He argued that the non-justiciability of the claim rests on the fact that “the implementation of relief sought would ‘cross institutional boundaries and enter into the area reserved for the Legislature’” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [17]).

Justice Lederer stated that the issue of housing insecurity brought forth by the applicants in this case was not one that could be solved by the judiciary, rather, it was an issue for the legislatures. He asserted that the courts cannot be asked to rule on issues related to economic policymaking. He argued that asking the courts to rule on this issue is akin to asking them “to embark on a course more resembling a public inquiry into the adequacy of housing policy” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [34]). To his credit, Justice Lederer acknowledged that the complexity of the legal challenge, its potential for a larger political impact, and the sensitivity of the subject matter were not reasons to reject the claim, but he asserted the lack of justiciability as grounds for

denying to consider the claim. Ultimately, in deciding to strike down this motion, Justice Lederer “concluded that here was no positive *Charter* obligation which required Canada and Ontario to provide for ‘affordable, adequate, accessible housing’” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [17]). Indeed, the *Charter* had been interpreted in the past within a formal equality paradigm, and the Ontario Superior Court was unwilling to challenge this interpretation despite a demonstrated need for a commitment to substantive equality in housing.

While the Ontario Court of Appeal agreed with the ruling issued by Justice Lederer, Justice Feldman provided a compelling dissent in this case. In the dissenting opinion, Justice Feldman clarified that the applicants were seeking constitutional remedies through the *Charter* against the governments of Canada and Ontario for persistent issues related to homelessness and inadequate housing. In other words, the applicants were not attacking specific pieces of legislation, but pointing to a lack thereof – they were seeking remedies “for what they say is the unconstitutional effect of the government’s withdrawal of programs and failure to legislate” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [41]). At the beginning of her dissent, Justice Feldman clearly pointed out that the novelty of the claim is not evidence of its lack of justiciability. She also rightly observed that the possibility of success or failure of the claim was difficult to establish, as the Court did not consider the 16-volume evidentiary record submitted by the applicants. She re-asserted that “[t]he purpose of a motion to strike is to weed out...claims that have no reasonable chance of success” and that a motion to strike “should not be used...as a tool to frustrate potential developments in the law” [49]. Just because the claimants’ assertion that inadequate housing provision violates their *Charter* rights was novel, did not mean that it is without grounds.

Justice Lederer had ruled that it is settled law that the government had no positive obligations under s. 7 to address homelessness and inadequate housing, as established in *Gosselin v. Quebec (Attorney General)*. However, Justice Feldman argued that *Gosselin* leaves the issue of positive obligations under s. 7 open-ended. For context, *Gosselin* was a case that ruled on whether reducing social assistance benefits for youth was in violation of the *Charter*. Ultimately, it was ruled that the application in *Gosselin* was deficient in evidence, and it was therefore rejected. However, the majority

opinion stated that “[t]he question therefore is not whether s. 7 has ever been—or will ever be—recognized as creating positive rights. Rather, the question is whether the *present circumstances* warrant a novel application of s. 7...” (cited Heffernan et al., 2015, p. 31). Put simply, the interpretation of s. 7 as potentially including an obligation to create positive rights was left open in *Gosselin* and should therefore not be immediately dismissed in *Tanudjaja*, as argued by Justice Feldman.

Justice Feldman went on to point out that while a lack of evidence was the reason for dismissal in *Gosselin*, the evidence presented in this case was not even considered. Indeed, the applicants submitted a 16-volume evidentiary report, which included 19 affidavits and totaled 10,000 pages. Justice Feldman rightly pointed out that “[i]t is premature and not within the intent of *Gosselin* to decide there are no ‘special circumstances’ in such a serious case, at the pleadings stage” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [66]).

In addressing the s.15 claim brought forth by the applicants, Justice Feldman noted that, although this was the weaker of the two claims, it was not without merit. In dismissing this application, Justice Lederer had stated that this claim should be struck as it had no reasonable cause of action and that a lack of housing does not flow from a lack of housing policy, but from wider social and economic problems. In response to these assertions, Justice Feldman stated that “it is not the role of a motion judge to...make factual findings that are not in the pleadings” (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [71]). To conclude, Justice Feldman stated that it was inappropriate to strike this claim as the pleadings stage, as:

while the claim is novel, both conceptually and substantively, it cannot be said, based on the state of the relevant jurisprudence to date, that the claim has no reasonable prospect of success. In *Gosselin*, the Supreme Court of Canada left open the issue of both the existence and the extent of positive obligations under the *Charter* to give effect to social and economic rights. It is therefore premature to decide at the pleadings stage that the issues are not justiciable (*Tanudjaja v. Canada*, 2014, [86]).

While the conflict between the various justices outlined above focused on the justiciability of the case, the conflict in *Tanudjaja* was also over whether Canada would maintain a formal equality approach to socio-economic issues like housing deprivation, or whether the *Charter* would be interpreted in new ways to hold legislatures and the judiciary accountable for the implementation of positive rights. This became especially pertinent when the issue of international human rights obligations entered the conversation. As pointed out by DesBaillets (2015) in his comment on this case, despite the fact that the *Charter* is inspired by international legal norms:

[j]udges have traditionally been reluctant to apply international human rights norms...often invoking the non-justiciability of such rights where there is no corresponding internal piece of legislation which implements them, even where the international legal instrument in question, has been signed and ratified by the Canadian government (p. 122).

For example, in his dismissal of this claim, Justice Lederer failed to recognize the importance of international human rights documents such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which—as pointed out by DesBaillets (2015)—articulated the right to adequate housing. Evidently, when international legal norms would oblige the Canadian government to engage in substantive equality measures, they are not considered by the courts.

Sadly, by arguing in favour of formal equality yet again, marginalized groups are denied the ability to “seek recognition of socio-economic rights in courts” (Bullen, 2015, p. 5). *Tanudjaja v. Canada* is a historic case in Canada—one that speaks to Canada’s refusal to commit to substantive equality, as well as the pressing need for a real and enforceable right to housing. While the introduction of the *NHS* in 2017 and the *NHS Act* in 2019 are steps in the right direction with regards to the recognition of housing as a human right, we have yet to see adequate housing become available to all Canadians. Sadly, the inequalities that inspired *Tanudjaja v. Canada* have yet to be resolved.

## Chapter 3: Methods

This research seeks to determine the extent to which LGBTQ refugees can access safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada. To achieve this, I employed two methods: a policy analysis and key-informant interviews. The policy analysis was conducted using the Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis approach, while the semi-structured key-informant interviews incorporated many different techniques, which will be explored further below. This chapter will outline these methods, the reasons they were chosen, and how they were applied to gain insight into the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees.

### 3.1 Policy Analysis

#### 3.1.1 What is IBPA? How is it applied?

Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis (IBPA) was developed “to better illuminate how policy constructs individuals’ and groups’ relative power and privileges vis-à-vis their socio-economic-political-status, health and well-being” (Hankivsky et al., 2014, pp. 1-2). Originally employed in healthcare fields, IBPA is well-suited to this research. This is because this project is interested in exploring the ways in which LGBTQ2 people and refugees (and indeed, LGBTQ refugees) are constructed as vulnerable by the NHS, as well as how the NHS tries to contend with and mitigate this housing vulnerability. IBPA is attuned to systems of power and the ways in which these systems structure the lives of marginalized people, as well as policy responses to this marginalization.

One of the strengths of a IBPA approach is how it allows the researcher to “captur[e] the different dimensions of policy contexts including history, politics, everyday lived experiences, diverse knowledges and intersecting social locations” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2). Because this research necessitated the analysis of diverse policy documents, extending from municipal housing policy to federal immigration policy, it required a method that could capture the nuances, contradictions and loaded socio-political histories that existed therein. Importantly, IBPA is not only a method for analyzing policy, but also a way to “generat[e] transformative insights, knowledge, policy

solutions and actions” (Hankivsky et al., 2014, p. 2). In a system like housing this is critical, as many people’s health, well-being, and (at times) survival is dependent on adequate housing and good housing policy. As such, the ability to generate actionable recommendations through policy analysis is crucial.

IBPA is a complex method, with many key principles and questions to guide its application. Taken together, these questions and principles can help reveal inequity at the core of policy and direct the researcher to avenues requiring change. The guiding principles of IBPA are presented in Table 2 (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 35-38):

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Intersecting categories	Researchers should think of “social categories as interacting with and co-constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 35)
Multi-level analysis	Researchers should be cognizant of the ways in which the operations of different institutions and governments affect individuals and groups along different axes of identity.
Power	Researchers should be aware of the ways in which power functions at discursive and structural levels, as well as how power shapes identity, privilege and oppression. Researchers should be mindful of the ways in which power is relational.
Reflexivity	Researchers should commit to practicing “critical self-awareness [and] role-

	awareness”, as well as continually interrogate their relationship to power and privilege, and the biases they may bring to their data (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 36).
Time and space	Researchers should be cognizant of the ways in which factors such as identity are differently constructed in different spaces, as well as across time. They should also be aware of how factors such as where they live affect how they approach their data.
Diverse knowledges	Researchers should take care to include “the perspectives and knowledges of peoples who are typically excluded in policy analysis” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 37).
Social justice	Research should attempt to challenge existing social structures and contribute to fights towards the achievement of justice and equity.
Equity	Equity is closely related to the principle of social justice. Researchers should consider policy through an intersectional lens and provide recommendations that will help to achieve fairness in outcomes for marginalized people.

Table 2: Guiding Principles for Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis

In addition to these guiding principles, IBPA employs two separate lines of questioning. The first is a line of *descriptive questioning*. In IBPA, descriptive questions aim to:



generate critical background information about policy problems in their full context, with specific attention to the processes and mechanisms by which policy problems are identified, constructed and addressed. Their purpose is to reveal assumptions that underpin existing government priorities, the populations targeted for policy interventions, and what inequities and privileges are created by current policy responses

(Hankivsky, 2014, p. 34).

The descriptive questions themselves are as follows: (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 39-40)

1. What knowledge, values and experiences do you bring to this area of policy analysis?
2. What is the policy 'problem' under consideration?
3. How have representations of the 'problem' come about?
4. How are groups differentially affected by this representation of the 'problem'?
5. What are current policy responses to the problem?

The second line of questioning is *transformative questioning*. Transformative questions are designed to “assist with the identification of alternative policy responses and solutions specifically aimed at social and structural change that reduce inequities and promote social justice” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 34). The transformative questions themselves are as follows (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 40-42):

6. What inequities actually exist in relation to the problem?
7. When and how can interventions be made to improve the problem?
8. What are feasible short, medium and long-term solutions?

9. How will proposed policy solutions reduce inequities?
10. How will implementation and uptake be assured?
11. How will you know if inequities have been reduced?
12. How has the process of engaging in an Intersectionality-Based Policy Analysis transformed your thinking on power relations; the ways in which you and others engage in policy work; and your “broader conceptualizations, relations and effects of power asymmetry in the everyday world?” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 42).

### 3.1.2 Why does IBPA make sense for this project?

An IBPA method was appropriate for this project for three main reasons. First, through its guiding principles and modes of questioning, IBPA is acutely attuned to power, space and place, social justice, and equity; all of which are important to this project. Power is relevant because forces such as racism, xenophobia, heterosexism and homo-, bi-, and transphobia, and capitalism are all determinative of housing outcomes for LGBTQ refugees. Space and place are relevant because this thesis is concerned with how LGBTQ refugees enter Canada (or not) and how they are able to find housing in Alberta and begin to make a home here (or not). Social justice and equity are relevant because seeking to expand access to adequate, affordable and suitable housing for marginalized people is social justice and human rights work.

Second, IBPA facilitates multi-level analysis, which was necessary to develop understanding of the complex, multi-layered housing and immigration policy context for LGBTQ refugees. I reviewed policy documents at the municipal, provincial, federal and international levels, and required a method of analysis that would allow me to not only make sense of such a wide array of policies, but also to identify what these policies sought to achieve. That is, I needed to be able to identify what approaches to immigration and housing were being endorsed by these policies, how ambitious these policies were in their aims, and (more specifically) if and how they could address housing vulnerability. In addition, IBPA allowed me to interrogate not only how policy

functioned differently across municipalities, but also how municipal policies differed in their goals from those of provincial and federal governments.

Third, IBPA made sense for this project because it is a method that is geared towards transformation. Through the course of this research, it became increasingly obvious that current housing policy in Alberta—and Canada more generally—is not meeting the housing needs of people and groups experiencing housing vulnerability, including LGBTQ refugees. As such, a transformation of the housing system is required. Through its transformative questions, IBPA helps to identify what areas of policy require transformation, as well as what such transformation should consist of, and how it can be achieved. This mode of analysis provides a foundation for making policy recommendations, the third objective of this research.

### 3.1.3 How did I implement IBPA?

IBPA was identified early-on as the method for my policy analysis, as it aligned with the broader feminist and social justice goals of my thesis. When conducting my policy analysis, I employed the descriptive questions to aid me in interrogating my positionality in relation to the policy documents and the issues they raised, as well as what problems were being raised (or, indeed created) by the policies I analyzed. For example, in immigration policy, refugee claimants were often represented as dishonest or ‘bogus’. This became evident through analysis of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which dedicated a lot of space to discussing the importance of “protect[ing] public health and safety and maintain[ing] the security of Canadian society” (3(h)). This kind of language implies that refugees represent a threat to health and safety – this supposed threat is constructed as a policy problem that can be remedied by treating refugees with greater scrutiny. Constantly questioning the representations of my research population in policy helped to draw out these findings. Finally, the descriptive line of question helped me to identify the ways in which LGBTQ refugees are differentially affected by policy, as well as what some potential solutions to this treatment may be. Overall, the descriptive questioning method helped me interrogate the texts more deeply as I read them, understanding that reading is an active process. Instead of absorbing information

passively, I was always looking for the ideologies, beliefs and histories that underpinned the assertions and decisions being made in policy.

After an initial reading using the descriptive line of questioning was complete, I would then revise my notes and annotations using the transformative line of questioning. While the descriptive questions aided me in determining what various policies meant, the transformative questions aided me in determining what the broader implications and impacts of these policies were. This involved considering what inequities were present in various policies, as well as what actions could be taken to mitigate or resolve these inequities. For example, when reading the policy for the GAR program, I took notice of the fact that it only provides one year of support, including for housing. I identified this as a site of inequity as the time-limited nature of this program meant that GARs may fall into a state of housing vulnerability after they were no longer eligible for the program. In the spirit of IBPA, I asked myself how this policy may be *transformed* to improve housing outcomes for refugees in the GAR program. In this case, the answer is fairly obvious – GARs should have access to housing supports (among others) for more than one year after arrival. The transformative line of question helped me to place myself and my research population within the policies I was reading, as well as determine how these policies could be amended to improve housing outcomes for LGBTQ refugees.

Finally, all of my notes, annotations, and writing were evaluated against the guiding principles for IBPA. I would reflect on whether what I has written about these policies really represented the complex intersectionality of LGBTQ refugees, whether my arguments were in line with my social justice goals, and whether they promoted equity in housing. I would ask myself if I had adequately considered the multiple levels of policy at play, as well as how long it took for LGBTQ refugees to find adequate housing? Had I properly accounted for the various spaces at play as refugees moved across the Canadian border and into housing? Had I properly accounted for my position within the broader housing system, as well as Albertan society? These principles held me accountable and ensured by research was meeting the exacting standards of my chosen method.

## 3.2 Key Informant Interviews

### 3.2.1 Description of Method

This research also involved key informant interviews with individuals working within the housing system, as well as LGBTQ2-serving and refugee-serving sectors. This approach was appropriate because “key informants hold special and expert knowledge about the phenomenon to be studied” (Moser & Korstjens, 2018, p. 10). Although the policy analysis provides valuable insights into the legal and policy context governing the lives of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta and Canada, key informants offer a different perspective, based on their experience working with clients and helping them navigate Alberta’s housing system. Taken together, the policy analysis and key informant interviews provide a more complete picture of the housing system LGBTQ refugees must navigate.

Interviews were semi-structured, and participants were encouraged to participate in a dialogue about their field of expertise, as opposed to “a strict question-answer interview” (Moser & Korstjens, 2018, p. 13). Throughout the interview process, I emphasized that questions were designed to be ‘jumping off points’ and encouraged participants to direct the interview to areas they deemed important or meaningful. The format of a semi-structured interview allowed me to ensure that certain key topics were covered, “while still allowing flexibility for participants to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion” (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 63). I found this format to be quite fruitful, as participants drew attention to important areas and concepts I had yet to consider, which were absent from both the literature review and policy analysis (e.g., priority in social housing, the experiences of refugee claimants). Overall, participants expanded upon ideas explored in other areas of the thesis, but also offered entirely new information and perspectives.

As participants came from different backgrounds, three sets of questions were developed: these focused on housing policy, the LGBTQ2-serving sector, the refugee-serving sector, respectively (see Appendix C). This approach was designed to allow each participant to speak directly to their field of expertise, with questions phrased in a way that would make sense to them, as terminology varied across fields. This said,

there was substantial overlap between these sets of questions, and all participants were asked directly about the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees.

### 3.2.2 Participant selection

Participants were approached based on their ability to speak to one or more areas of this research. They were identified using three primary methods: first, my supervisor put me in contact with some participants based on pre-existing professional connections; second, some participants were identified based on my pre-existing professional connections; and third, several initial contacts explained that they did not wish to be interviewed for this project, but recommended approaching other relevant organizations. All participants were initially contacted via email, with a brief description of the research project.

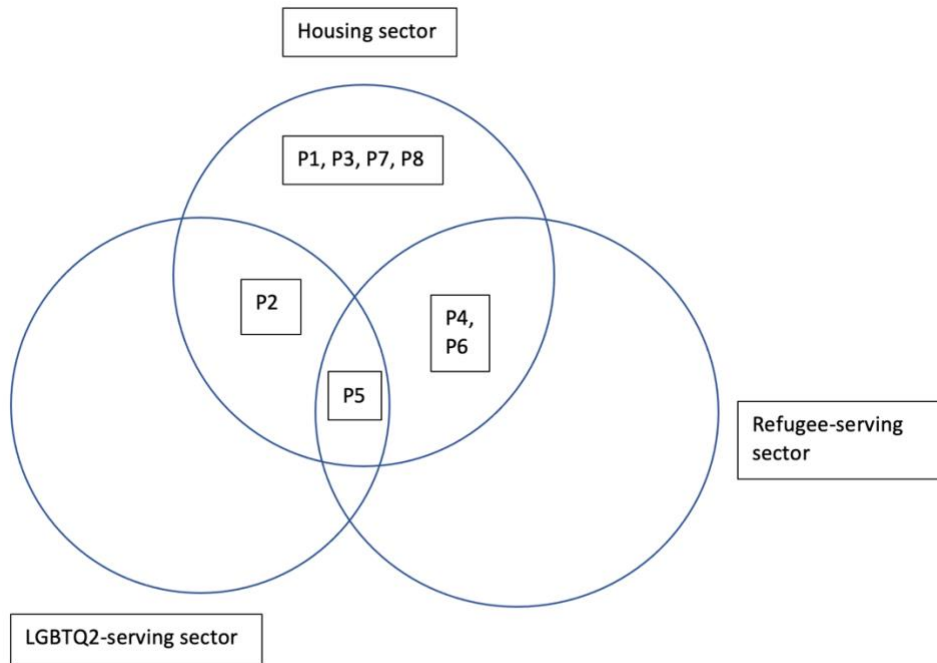
Many organizations or participants contacted declined to participate, either because they did not feel they possessed sufficient expertise, or because they were simply too busy to at the time. For those who did express interest in participating in an interview, a letter of initial contact describing the study in further detail was provided, as well as a consent form (see Appendices A and B). Next, an interview was scheduled over Zoom, at a date and time that was convenient for the participant. Zoom was utilized to conduct interviews in order to protect the health of myself and the participants, as the spread of COVID-19 remained an issue throughout the time that the interviews took place. Utilizing Zoom also allowed me to conduct interviews with two participants who were not living in Edmonton, the city in which I live.

Overall, eight one-on-one interviews were conducted. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds and offered diverse perspectives on the topic (see Table 3). While participants P5 and P8 currently work in academia, both had previously worked in relevant sectors and study LGBTQ2 issues and housing issues, respectively. Most participants were based in the Edmonton area, but nonetheless had extensive knowledge of how their respective sectors operated across the province.

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Employment sector</b>
P1	Formerly Edmonton	Housing
P2	Edmonton	LGBTQ2-focused
P3	Edmonton	Housing
P4	Calgary	LGBTQ refugee-focused
P5	Edmonton	Academia/LGBTQ2
P6	Edmonton	LGBTQ refugee-focused
P7	Edmonton	Housing
P8	Edmonton	Academia/housing

*Table 3: Participant information*

Many participants occupied multiple fields of expertise, as illustrated by Figure 2 below. For example, participants P4 and P6 were able to speak to all the relevant sectors, as they worked directly with LGBTQ refugees and aided their clients in finding housing. Moreover, most participants had been engaged with their fields for many years, and therefore had a wealth of knowledge to draw on that was not limited to their current position. Figure 2 illustrates the participants' primary fields of expertise, although many were able to speak to other areas.



*Figure 2: Participant expertise*

Although the number of participants was relatively small, these interviews nonetheless provided profound and detailed information on the ways the housing system operates in Alberta, as well insights into how LGBTQ refugees navigate this system. This is in line with the goals of key informant interviews as a method, as they “aim for depth and understanding rather than breadth and coverage” (McDowell, 2010, p. 158). Indeed, these interviews provided new insights into my specific area of interest and elaborated on my policy analysis. As many participants were able to speak to multiple areas of interest, they could provide a nuanced analysis of how housing policy affects LGBTQ refugees specifically. The number of participants was also limited due to a small pool of potential participants. Indeed, many of the individuals who I contacted during recruitment felt that they could not speak to the experiences of LGBTQ refugees in housing, as this is a relatively small and under-researched population. As such, there were few potential experts to draw on.

Interviews varied in length, but none exceeded one hour. As interview participants were donating their time, I was mindful to wrap up interviews at the 45 minute to one-hour mark, as this was the length of time we had agreed to during



scheduling. One interview ended before the one-hour mark, as this participant worked in a client-facing role and had to terminate the interview early in order to help a client.

### 3.2.3 Data collection and analysis

At the beginning of each interview, I confirmed that the consent form had been read and understood by the participant and clarified any questions that they had. I also emphasized that all questions were optional, and that the participant could decline to answer a question or redact any information provided at any time. I also assured participants that their identities would remain confidential, and all information provided would be anonymized, so they would feel comfortable speaking freely about their experiences. After their rights as participants were well understood, I began audio-recording the interviews using my cellphone with the participants' permission. Following the interviews, these recordings were immediately uploaded to a folder on my password-protected computer.

All interviews were transcribed in full with the help of a transcription service. After these interviews were transcribed, I listened to the audio-recordings while re-reading the transcripts to ensure that they were accurate. Transcripts were edited accordingly. Next, completed transcripts were uploaded to NVIVO to begin the coding process.

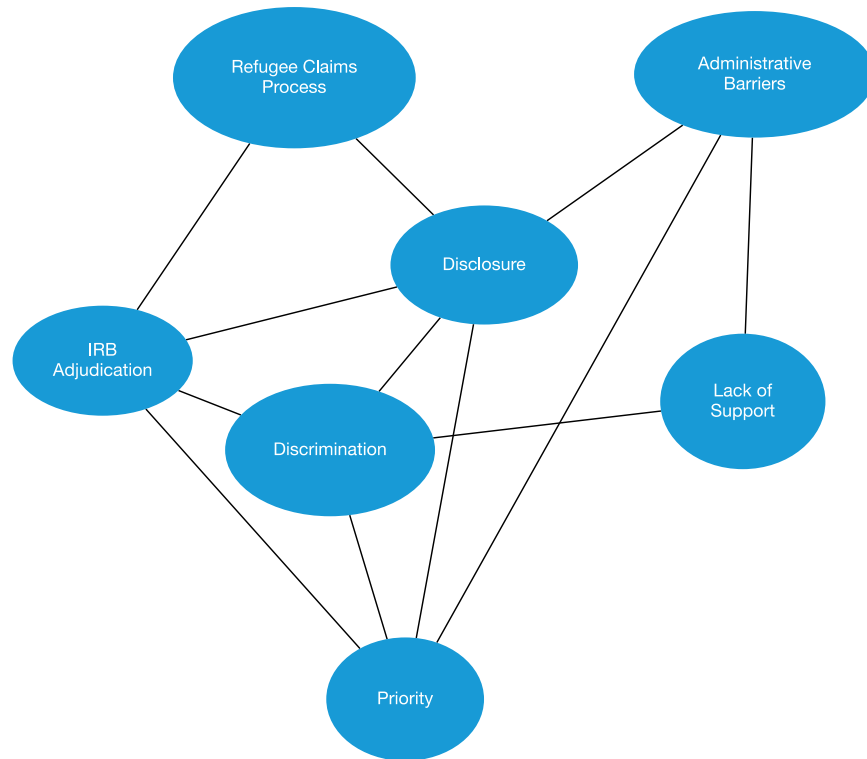
I engaged in a process of thematic coding, following the approach described by Williams & Moser (2019) in their article "The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research." Per their technique, I took an inductive approach to coding, "generating theory from collected data" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 47). My approach was tripartite, utilizing open, axial and selective coding. This process functions cyclically—described by Williams & Moser (2019) as a 'data loop'—wherein data is constantly compared and consolidated.

During the process of open coding, I focused on "identifying distinct concepts and themes for categorization" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 48). In other words, I set out to organize similar ideas, words and phrases to identify commonalities and differences in the information provided by participants. During this stage, I employed the popular 5W-

1H approach, identifying the ‘who, what, when, where, why, and how’ of each statement provided by a participant. For example, I would ask myself *what* phenomenon a participant was describing, *who* it affects and *how*, as well as *when* and *where* this phenomenon transpires. This line of questioning allowed me to develop initial codes: “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (Saldafina cited in Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 46).

Next, I engaged in axial coding, which “further refines, aligns and categorizes themes” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 50). During this stage, relationships between codes developed during open coding were identified to refine these codes into common themes. This was accomplished using the 6 Cs approach, wherein commonalities between causes, contexts, consequences, covariances and conditions across codes were identified. For example, if a phenomenon described by a participant (such as discrimination) had a similar cause or consequence as another code, they might be grouped together into a theme. The 6 Cs approach was employed during line-by-line coding, when I engaged in a close reading of interview transcripts to familiarize myself more intimately with the data. This approach also enabled me to ensure that codes developed during open coding accurately captured what the participant was describing in their responses.

Finally, I engaged in a process of selective coding, which “enables the researcher to *select* and integrate categories of organized data from axial coding into cohesive and meaning-filled expressions” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 52). At this stage, themes were finalized, with some being deleted or combined into other themes. The codes contained within themes were also re-evaluated to ensure that they ‘fit’ or made sense within their respective themes. At this stage, I also used NVIVO’s thematic mapping function to help me visualize the data (see Figure 3 for an example).



*Figure 3: Thematic map for the theme 'Bureaucracy'*

As mentioned above, while the process of coding generally followed the order of open, then axial, then selective coding, this process was cyclical and iterative. At each stage of the coding process, I was developing new codes and themes, and well as consolidating and cementing themes. I used the themes generated during this process to write the Results section for this thesis.

### 3.2.4 Conclusion

This research set out to determine whether LGBTQ refugees are able to access safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada. In order to do so, a policy analysis, along with eight key-informant interviews, were conducted. Employing these two methods allowed me to develop a thorough understanding of the policy context surrounding the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees, as well as gain valuable insights into how these policies affect the lives of this demographic. In the following chapter, I explore the results generated from the data collected using these methods.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Policy Analysis

The housing context in Alberta is shaped by four interrelated levels of housing policy: municipal, provincial, federal, and international. Beyond this, the housing context for refugees in Canada (including LGBTQ refugees) is also influenced by federal immigration policy, provincial assistance rates (through programs like the Resettlement Assistance Program) and standards set by governing bodies such as the United Nations. Despite strong progressive rhetoric surrounding housing and migration (such as discussions of the right to housing, the expansion of Alberta's affordable housing stock, and family reunification through migration), individuals and families across Alberta (including LGBTQ people and refugees) face substantial and mounting barriers to securing adequate housing. As such, there remains plenty of work to be done—in government, academia and on the ground—to ensure that no Albertan is forced to live in a state of housing deprivation, and that the intersectional needs of LGBTQ refugees are addressed. This chapter will explore the ways in which housing and immigration policy shape housing outcomes for LGBTQ refugees specifically, and for Albertans generally, examining policy limitations and avenues for change.

#### 4.1.1 Municipal housing policy analysis

##### *4.1.1.1 Introduction*

To evaluate municipal responses to housing deprivation, I analyzed municipal housing plans and strategies from cities across Alberta: Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, Grande Prairie and the Wood Buffalo region (encompassing Fort McMurray). Municipal housing documents were evaluated to determine if the plans and strategies identified groups in housing need, if LGBTQ refugees and immigrants were among these groups, as well as the extent to which these plans were able to respond to the unique needs of the identified groups. Additionally, I evaluated the extent to which municipal housing policy in Alberta sought to advance substantive equality for all those experiencing housing deprivation, in terms of improving material conditions.

#### 4.1.1.2 Policy overview

Most of the municipalities examined as a part of this research acknowledged that certain groups are more likely to experience housing vulnerability in their city. However, there is little continuity across municipalities in terms of which groups are identified as experiencing housing deprivation, with some municipalities such as Red Deer providing an extensive list of different vulnerable groups in their city (Red Deer & District Community Foundation, 2019, p. 1), while others such as Edmonton mention a more specific set of groups such as “children, Aboriginal households and immigrants,” and only in passing (City of Edmonton, 2016, p.1). Regardless of the details provided within their policy documents, no municipality examined here unpacked why certain groups may be more susceptible to housing vulnerability, what the root cause of that vulnerability may be, nor what kinds of systemic failings produce and exacerbate the deprivation they identified among their residents. The remedy or meaningful change they can offer to such groups will be constrained by these limitations.

In the City of Edmonton’s *Updated Affordable Housing Investment Plan (2019-2022)* and *Affordable Housing Strategy (2016-2025)*, it is acknowledged that affordability is a major issue in Edmonton, with 48,550 low-income renters spending more than 30 percent of their annual income on rent in 2016 (City of Edmonton, 2018, p. 2). In response to this fact, the City of Edmonton has committed to “ensuring all residents can afford a place to live” by developing 2,500 new units of affordable housing (City of Edmonton, 2018, p. 1). This investment in the expansion of Edmonton’s affordable housing stock is laudable, but by failing to consider which groups make up Edmonton’s low-income renters, the City will be unable to meet specific needs. For example, groups such as immigrants or LGBTQ people might benefit from housing in proximity to certain services, or near existing community anchors, where they can access supports and connect with other members of their community. As such, an increase in affordable housing *generally* may still fall short of aiding these groups *specifically*. This lack of targeted intervention is a trend across municipalities in Alberta.

The City of Calgary’s plan has similar limitations. While the rhetoric around social and affordable housing in Calgary is strong—with its *Affordable Housing Strategy (2016-2025)* extensively outlining the many social and economic benefits of social and

affordable housing—it still falls short of specifying who needs social and affordable housing and why. In the introduction to *Foundations for Home: Calgary's Corporate Affordable Housing Strategy 2016-2025*, it is asserted that “[a]t the most fundamental level, affordable housing is about people” (City of Calgary, 2016, p. 3). However, these very people—Calgarians who are pushed into a state of housing deprivation for all sorts of reasons—exist out of frame. By not examining who experiences housing need in Calgary, the City effectively obscures the interlocking systems (such as heterosexism, patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy) that push groups into a state of housing need, and therefore offers no challenge to these systems or solutions to the issues they cause. Instead, the City of Calgary focuses on how individuals may be successful within the existing market-led system (i.e., providing more affordable housing, the development of new jobs), rather than posing a challenge to a system that produced housing vulnerability and economic precarity in the first instance.

The City of Lethbridge, however, pays closer attention to who experiences housing need, as well as how the market produces such need. In the *City of Lethbridge Municipal Housing Strategy 2019-2025*, it is argued that “[d]ue to demographic, social, economic, and geographic factors which impact housing need and demand, the private market does not always meet the full range of housing need in a community” (City of Lethbridge, 2019, p. 5). It is further acknowledged that “[t]his is particularly true for individual and families with low incomes or for persons with unique housing and support service needs” (City of Lethbridge, 2019, p. 5). Indeed, the City of Lethbridge identifies both immigrants and refugees as groups that are sometimes failed by the private market, as well as youth, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and mental illness, seniors, and single parents (City of Lethbridge, 2019, p. 28). This is because these groups are more likely to have low household incomes compared to other households in Lethbridge. While the City of Lethbridge acknowledges that affordability is an issue in Lethbridge’s housing market, and that certain groups are more likely to be priced out of the market than others, the ways in which the City of Lethbridge will meet the intersectional needs of the groups identified, and the ways in which it will challenge the market it has identified as failing its residents, remains unclear.

The City of Medicine Hat also differs from other municipalities in Alberta due to its strong and enduring commitment to ending homelessness. *At Home in Medicine Hat: Our Plan to End Homelessness* states that “[a]n end to homelessness in Medicine Hat is not only possible; it is within reach with relatively minor additional funding infusion” (Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, 2014, p. 7). According to this plan, the City would only require \$12.6 million to effectively solve the homelessness crisis. This money would be directed towards expanding Medicine Hat’s permanent supportive housing stock and its existing rapid rehousing program. Medicine Hat is unique in that the City frames housing deprivation as a solvable problem that it is responsible for finding a solution to, as opposed to a crisis that must be managed, but never resolved. Moreover, Medicine Hat is attentive to *who* is homeless or in housing need, pointing to their growing immigrant population as one group in need of affordable housing (as well as renters, people living with addiction and mental health issues, youth, and those leaving institutional care). Their municipal plan to end homelessness understands widescale affordable housing as the solution to housing deprivation. In so doing, the City seeks to realize the right to housing, which the *Medicine Hat Community Housing Society Service Delivery Plan 2019-2020* endorses:

The right to safe, suitable, adequate and affordable housing is a fundamental human right that we all share. It is not something that needs to be earned; we are all deserving of a place to call home. Housing is essential to the vitality and well-being of individuals, families, and communities across Alberta. It is the foundation on which people build healthy and productive lives; on which we build strong communities (Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, 2019, p. 2).

The strength of the City of Medicine Hat’s commitment to housing its residents is admirable and could be emulated in municipalities across Alberta. That said, how the affordable housing in question will be tailored to meet the unique needs of populations experiencing housing vulnerability remains unclear.

Red Deer—like many other municipalities in Alberta—identifies many groups in housing need, such as: Indigenous peoples; seniors; youth; families; women; active substance users; individuals with mental illness or other chronic health conditions;

individuals leaving institutions; and newcomers to Canada (Red Deer & District Community Foundation, 2014). The City of Red Deer also takes pains to emphasize that *many* of us could enter a state of homelessness, stating that the homeless population is made up of “individuals and families, youth and seniors, longtime residents and newcomers” (Red Deer & District Community Foundation, 2014, p. 1). However, Red Deer falls short of identifying any specific remedy to their housing insecurity. Similarly, Red Deer also focuses on the prevention of homelessness through the provision of housing. Finally, the City of Red Deer sees housing as a means to address social issues that extend beyond homelessness, including unemployment, addictions, and health-related issues.

Grande Prairie diverges quite significantly from the other municipalities examined in that its housing plan focuses on the housing market generally, in addition to specific groups contending with housing vulnerability. This is because Grande Prairie’s dependence on the oil economy means that their housing market is cyclical and unstable. The high average incomes in Grande Prairie “put pressure on housing prices”, meaning many residents of Grande Prairie who do not earn high wages in the oil and gas sector are priced out of housing (City of Grande Prairie, 2011, p. 6). That said, the cyclical nature of Grande Prairie’s economy means that even high earners can be priced out of housing, with “the most recent economic downturn result[ing] in an increase in foreclosures even in higher end housing” (City of Grande Prairie, 2011, p. 6). In this sense, the issues that plague all Albertan municipalities—an unstable housing market, increasingly unaffordable housing—are heightened due to the large income disparities in Grande Prairie. It is perhaps because of this that Grande Prairie is one of the only municipalities to propose measures to regulate the market, such as rent control, to mitigate the harms done by the boom/bust economic cycle.

Finally, Wood Buffalo region is also concerned about issues of housing affordability. Their 2019 Annual Housing Report states that despite rental subsidy programs and high vacancy rates, people in the Wood Buffalo region cannot afford market rental rates and continue to be priced out of housing. Even residents earning up to \$70,000 annually faced housing affordability issues, with those earning less than \$40,000 experiencing significant housing vulnerability. Overall, the Wood Buffalo region



identifies affordability as a general issue facing many residents but did not identify specific groups in housing need (i.e. it does not interrogate which groups are more likely to have insufficient income and why).

#### *4.1.1.3 Limitations of existing policy*

While many municipalities identify specific groups that experience housing need in Alberta (focusing generally on seniors, youth, immigrants and newcomers, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities), existing policy does not identify what the particular needs of these groups are, let alone offer solutions designed to meet the specific needs of these groups. Moreover, existing policy fails to consider that many individuals experience compounding marginalization and vulnerability, rendering the 'one-size-fits-all' solutions offered (namely, affordable housing) inadequate. While all people in housing need are adversely affected when there is a lack of affordable housing, they are not all affected equally or in the same way. Notably, no municipality identifies LGBTQ people as a group experiencing housing vulnerability, despite queer people being overrepresented in poverty statistics (Poverty Hub, 2021). Moreover, municipalities do not employ intersectionality to consider the ways in which a multiplicity of membership may affect housing outcomes for individuals belonging to multiple groups in housing need. It follows that the queer refugee does not exist in Albertan municipal housing policy, and the specific barriers they may face in securing housing remain uninterrogated.

Another shortcoming with municipal housing policy in Alberta is the limited nature of its vision. It is difficult for municipalities to propose structural solutions to housing problems due to their dependence on other levels of government for funding. That said, many of the solutions proposed in the policy documents focus on slightly altering the housing system (i.e., expanding the affordable housing stock, increasing units of permanent supportive housing), as opposed to challenging the market that created this housing vulnerability in the first instance. As such, existing housing policy will fall short of achieving substantive equality for Albertans even if its goals are met. While it is true that increasing housing affordability in Alberta is necessary and helpful, it does not

ensure that all Albertans will be able to access the kind of housing they require, when and where they require it. Simply rendering housing ‘more affordable’ does not challenge the commodification of housing, nor ensure that all Albertans will be able to access housing unconditionally. Rather, it ensures that when individuals seek housing within the existing system (that has failed and is failing them) they will be able to do so at reduced cost.

#### 4.1.2 Provincial housing analysis

##### 4.1.2.1 Introduction

There are three policy domains that govern the housing system in Alberta. The first is policy that pertains directly to housing, such as provincial affordable housing strategies and reviews. The second is programs governing Alberta’s welfare regime, such as Alberta Works, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and the provincial Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program. Finally, general legislation such as the *Alberta Human Rights Act* seeks to ensure equitable access to housing. Despite these multi-faceted interventions into the housing system, many people nonetheless find themselves in a state of housing deprivation.

##### 4.1.2.2 Housing policy

The provincial government’s primary intervention in the housing system in Alberta consists of an effort to expand the affordable housing stock, as demonstrated in the two most recent housing strategies. The provincial strategy for 2017-2021 will be discussed first, and then compared with the updated strategy, released in 2021. According to the former document—*Making Life Better: Alberta’s Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy*—the province plans to invest \$1 Billion into affordable housing between 2017 and 2021 (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 3). This includes investing in existing units, as “[m]any affordable housing buildings are more than 40 years old and are in disrepair due to years of underfunding” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 3). Many units will need to be knocked down and rebuilt as they are in a state of disrepair. By the end of 2021, the provincial government plans to rebuild 2,000 units of affordable housing.

To facilitate access to existing affordable housing, the Alberta government also adjusted eligibility criteria. Specifically, the asset limit to qualify for affordable housing increased from \$7,000 to \$25,000, allowing tenants to “save for their future” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 6). The goal of this policy change is to assist Albertans in achieving financial independence, as it “improves the tenant’s opportunity to transition to market housing or home ownership” (Government of Alberta, 2017, p. 6). To further this transition, the province has introduced new funding models, including mixed-income housing, which would allow tenants could remain in the same building if their income increased over time, so long as they pay an adjusted rent.

According to proponents of mixed-income housing, this model provides low-income tenants with access to social networking opportunities, as interacting with higher-income tenants or homeowners will increase their access to resources, information and employment opportunities (Joseph et al., 2007, p. 373). Supporters of mixed-income housing also argue that this model enhances social control, as “the presence of higher-income residents will lead to higher levels of accountability to norms and rules through increased informal social control and thus increased order and safety for all residents” (Joseph et al., 2007, p. 373). Due to this heightened level of social control, it is assumed that low-income tenants will alter their behaviours, lifestyles and norms to match those of higher-income residents; a change that is presumed to be for the better.

At their core, these kinds of assertions are predicated on the paternalistic notion that higher-income residents are morally and/or socially superior to low-income tenants, and that lower-income tenants should aspire to emulate them. It should go without saying that such beliefs are unfair and profoundly stigmatizing. Beyond this, the assertions made by proponents of mixed-income housing are largely unfounded, with “little empirical evidence to support [them]” (Defilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 137). One of the only proven benefits of mixed-income housing for low-income residents is tied to the “political economy of place” (Joseph et al., 2007), wherein the political influence of higher income residents enables them to lobby for higher quality local goods and services for all.

Mixed-income housing also has negative impacts. In broad terms, it has been critiqued by housing scholars for failing to challenge existing inequalities within the housing system. For example, it may contribute to processes of gentrification that displace many low-income people from their homes in the process of creating new ones. Through the creation of “desirable housing markets”, private investors increase property values in the vicinity of mixed-income housing, pricing many people out of the area in the process (Defilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 142). As stated convincingly by August (2016): “the notion that gentrification can be used to solve social problems in public housing is somewhat of a cruel joke, given that the process is known to have negative social and political effects on low-income and racially marginalised groups” (p. 3420). While mixed-income housing—at least on its surface—appears to benefit low-income people by deconcentrating poverty, in many respects it renders the housing context for low-income people even more precarious.

Mixed-income developments also rely on the profits of private real estate investors, which is a “deeply inequitable (and risky) way to allocate investment into public housing” (August, 2016, p. 3420). The risk that mixed-income housing poses is partially due to the model’s reliance on rental income generated by market-rate tenants to subsidize the housing of low-income tenants paying an adjusted rent. This renders low-income tenants’ housing contingent on the ability of landlords to secure market-rate rent. Moreover, affluent tenants and residents may pose a risk to low-income tenants. According to Joseph et al. (2007), higher political participation from affluent residents may lead to “the unequal distribution of power and resources among residents”, resulting in “differential benefits that favour those with more influence” (p. 394). In this sense, mixed-income housing may serve to exacerbate inequalities instead of closing the gap between low-income tenants and other residents. Indeed, one of the major shortcomings of the mixed-income housing model is that it accepts wealth disparities as a fact of life, as opposed to an issue into which the state should intervene.

Given the limitations of the mixed-income housing model, it is useful to question why the Alberta government would commit itself to this approach. It provides very little explanation for why it has chosen this model. Housing providers in Alberta, however, have been more transparent. The Calgary Housing Company (CHC), for example,

points to constrained provincial investment as one of the reasons it has chosen a mixed-income approach:

Driven by continued under-investment by the Province, CHC has embarked on a transformational journey from the current deep subsidy model to a mixed-rent model that provides more choice and mobility for tenants, increases transparency for tenants and – after deferred maintenance is addressed – will require less government subsidy as near-market rents begin to offset those paid by lower income tenants (p. 2).

It appears that the neglect of social and affordable housing by the provincial government has placed providers in a position where they must choose a flawed housing distribution model in order to ensure that they are continually able to provide subsidized housing to low-income individuals who rely on such programs.

The *Final Report of Alberta Affordable Housing Review Panel* also focuses on the expansion of the affordable housing stock through partnerships with private investors. Due to Alberta's high vacancy rates (5.4% compared to an ideal 3.0%), the provincial government is interested in working with private landlords to provide rental supplements "to leverage private stock that is currently vacant and could be used as affordable housing" (SHS Consulting, 2020, p. 17). That said, it is important to note that vacancy rates can change considerably, and this strategy only makes sense when vacancy rates are high. The ultimate goal of this partnership would be to encourage Albertans to exit social and affordable housing and eventually become financially self-sustaining in the private rental market.

To add to this discussion of affordable housing, the report also identifies multiple groups in Alberta that are currently deprived of adequate housing. The report notes that single adults and immigrant families are the primary occupants of social housing in urban centres. People with disabilities, formerly homeless individuals, LGBTQ2 people, survivors of intimate partner violence, Indigenous peoples and people with mental illness and substance use disorders are also identified as groups whose needs that may not be fulfilled through conventional housing systems. However, what these specific needs are—as well as how the housing system in Alberta will be modified to meet these

needs—is not discussed beyond establishing partnerships with relevant communities and increasing the size of some social housing units to render them suitable for intergenerational living. Based on the critiques of mixed-income housing discussed above, it is not clear that the current affordable housing strategy in Alberta will be able to meet the intersectional needs of these groups.

In addition to these policy documents, the housing context in Alberta is influenced by the province's most recent affordable housing plan, entitled *Stronger Foundations: Alberta's 10-year strategy to improve and expand affordable housing*. This strategy acknowledges the importance of accessible housing, noting that “[h]ousing is more than just infrastructure” and represents “a strong foundation for social, economic, and community participation” (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 5). With this in mind, the province plans to increase the number of households that Alberta's housing system can support by a total of 25,000 (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 5). This target will be fulfilled through increasing the affordable housing stock by 13,000 units, and through 12,000 rent supplements (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 5). While rent supplements will not expand Alberta's affordable housing stock, they can function to make private rental housing more affordable, at least during times of high vacancy rates, and “will serve to provide more immediate relief to the demand for affordable housing” (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 5).

It is important to note, however, that the province does not plan to implement these changes directly. Rather, it seeks to “[t]ransition the [Government of Alberta] from being a significant owner and operator of housing stock into a regulator and funder, enabling and facilitating partnerships and collaboration” (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 11). Indeed, the Government of Alberta seeks to meet the housing needs of Albertans through partnerships with other levels of governments (including and especially municipalities), non-profits and private housing providers and various communities. In some ways, this is a positive move, as it enables greater participation from First Nations governments and Métis organizations. In other ways, however, this transition from owner/operator to funder/regulator simply means downloading the responsibility for housing provision. This is where *Stronger Foundations* differs most significantly from *Making Life Better*—although both strategies are focused on

affordable housing, and both incorporate involvement of the private sector—*Stronger Foundations* seeks to explicitly remove the province from the planning and provision of affordable housing.

*Stronger Foundations* also identifies multiple populations in housing need, including LGBTQ2 people and recent immigrants and refugees. In addition to these groups, the strategy names Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, women and children fleeing violence, people at risk of health and safety in current accommodation, seniors, people dealing with mental health and addiction, youth exiting government care, veterans, and racialized groups (Government of Alberta, 2021, p. 15-16). That said, it provides no details as to how these groups experience housing vulnerability, how they will be removed from a state of housing vulnerability, nor how their intersectional needs will be met (including as the Government of Alberta transitions out of an owner/operator role when it comes to the provision of housing).

#### *4.1.2.3 Income Support*

In Alberta, there are two primary means through which persons without disabilities can access income supports. Generally speaking, qualifying Albertans access Alberta Income Support, otherwise known as Alberta Works. Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), however, access income support through the Alberta Resettlement Assistance Program, otherwise known as RAP. Regardless of which program individuals access, the rates remain woefully inadequate. Indeed, as of 2016, welfare incomes in Alberta represented only 37.7 percent of the after-tax poverty line (Tweedle et al., 2017, p. 41). In other words, even after receiving social assistance from the province, Albertans accessing programs such as Alberta Works or RAP still live significantly below the poverty line. Their ability to access safe and adequate housing is therefore extremely compromised. Indeed, individuals accessing income support programs in Alberta are classified as living in a state of ‘deep poverty’ (Maytree, 2021).

The ‘deep poverty’ these recipients experience becomes more obvious once Alberta Works and RAP shelter rates are compared to average rental rates in cities across Alberta. The shelter allowances for Alberta Works and RAP are identical:

\$330/month for a single adult living in private housing (Anderson-Baron & Collins, 2019). This is appalling, given that the average rental rate for a one-bedroom unit in Edmonton is \$1,031/month (CMHC, 2021, p. 19), compared to \$1,087/month in Calgary (CMHC, 2021, p. 25). This shelter allowance would also not cover the average rental rate in Red Deer, which was \$1,192 in 2020 (CMHC, 2020). It is important to note that even when combining the ‘core essential’ benefit of \$536/month with the \$330/month ‘core shelter’ allowance, an individual living in private housing *still* cannot afford the average rental rate in any of the cities identified (Alberta Government, 2019, n.p.).

Alberta’s RAP offers GARs slightly more than just allowances for basic necessities, providing assistance in applying for mandatory federal and provincial documents, supportive counseling and life skills support, as well as referrals to other community organizations. Despite these added provisions for GARs, the extremely low income support rates in Alberta—which are no longer indexed to the cost-of-living—mean that social assistance programs in Alberta fall significantly short in aiding individuals and families to meet their basic needs, including the need for safe and stable housing. This is especially true for immigrants, refugees, and women, all of whom are more likely to be classified as low-income in Alberta (Eremenko, 2018). As such, these programs fail to achieve substantive equality for groups across Alberta, including LGBTQ refugees.

This remains true for people with disabilities accessing income support. While rates for Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped are higher than for general income support (\$1,685/month compared to \$866/month for Alberta Works, including the \$330/month shelter allowance), individuals drawing AISH nonetheless find themselves below the poverty line (Maytree, 2021). Like Alberta Works and RAP, AISH has been de-indexed by the United Conservative Party government, which has “eaten into the real purchasing power” of this benefit, rendering it more difficult for AISH recipients to afford necessities, even if they are also accessing programs like subsidized housing (Fletcher, 2020).

These low rates for AISH—as well as other income support programs in Alberta—can be at least partially attributed to the provincial government’s imperative to



‘get people back to work.’ Indeed, “[t]he province encourages people on AISH to work, if they can, to add to their income. Those who earn past a certain threshold can have the benefit clawed back, but still end up making more money than if they weren’t working at all” (Fletcher, 2020, n.p.). Despite the fact individuals drawing AISH are classified by the province as ‘severely disabled’, they are still expected to work and earn a wage in order to survive. As such, AISH—along with Alberta Works and RAP—constitutes what Goa (2010) describes as a ‘welfare-to-work’ policy wherein the imperative to get Albertans back to work, and sustain themselves through wage labour, overrides “social contracts which focus on equality, solidarity, and the sharing of wealth” (p. 61). In this sense, the welfare state in Alberta is fundamentally unwilling to meet the needs of its citizens. Even when affordable housing is ostensibly guaranteed through rent-gear-to-income models for those who qualify, all else remains unaffordable and out of reach. In this sense, even Albertan social assistance recipients who do not exist in a state of housing need find themselves in a state of heightened economic precarity.

#### *4.1.2.4 Anti-discrimination law*

Alberta’s housing system is also governed by anti-discrimination legislation; namely, the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. This Act ostensibly aids marginalized groups secure housing in Alberta, as it prohibits discrimination on the basis of “race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, or sexual orientation” (Preamble). This means that LGBTQ refugees should not be denied housing on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, country of origin, or source of income, consistent with “the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all persons” (Preamble). However, discrimination is exceedingly hard to prove, as providing evidence of “discriminatory intent has become central, making it almost impossible to win these cases when they are brought to court” (Spade, 2015, p. 41). This means that the inherent dignity and equality of all persons are in no way guaranteed in practice in Alberta.

According to the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, a violation occurs only when an individual discriminates against another individual, a perspective that ultimately “serves to naturalize and affirm the status quo of maldistribution” (Spade, 2015, p. 42). That is to say, according to the Act, there is no violation when an individual is denied housing for a reason that does not explicitly involve a protected ground (e.g., there is no affordable housing available, or they are unable to pay rent due to abysmal social assistance rates). This denial of harm serves to normalize a mode of housing distribution wherein individuals can be denied housing so long as inter-personal discrimination is absent. The absence of discrimination alone is inadequate to ensure Albertans have access to safe and adequate housing, and anti-discrimination law that is not accompanied by protection of ESC rights will be unable to realize the right to housing in Alberta (and beyond). If meaningful equality and dignity for Albertans is to be achieved, the provincial government must ensure the availability of affordable housing, as well as social assistance rates that do not leave recipients in poverty,

#### 4.1.3 Federal policy analysis

##### 4.1.3.1 Introduction

Both housing and migration policy dictate the kinds of supports to which LGBTQ refugees are entitled upon entering and settling in Canada and are determinative of the quality of services and housing individuals are able to access. The housing policy context at the federal level is governed by the *NHS* and the *NHS Act*, which work together to determine the amount of funding that will be channeled into housing, as well as where this funding is directed. The migration policy context, however, features many different documents and policies, which dictate the kinds of services and funding that immigrants (including LGBTQ refugees) are able to access upon arrival. As we will see, the kind of aid being offered to low-income immigrants is largely inadequate; programs are either underfunded, or time-limited, and thereby erect barriers to LGBTQ refugees’ achievement of stable livelihoods in their new homeland.

#### 4.1.3.2 Federal Housing Policy

Two of the primary policy documents governing housing at the federal level are the *NHS Act* and the *NHS* that accompanies it. They outline the federal government's strategy to achieve a future wherein adequate and stable housing is available to every Canadian. According to the *NHS Act*, the achievement of such a goal is necessary, as housing is "essential to the inherent dignity and well-being of the person and to building sustainable and inclusive communities as well as a strong national economy in which the people of Canada can prosper and thrive" (Preamble). Indeed, the *NHS Act* states that the Canadian government's social, economic, health and environmental goals would be impossible to achieve without access to affordable housing. Importantly, in Section 4(a) the *NHS Act* recognizes housing not only as a means to improve Canadian society, but as a right to which all people are entitled.

Central to the *NHS Act* is developing and maintaining a national housing strategy that articulates "a common vision, key principles and a coordinated approach to achieving improved housing outcomes" (Preamble). This vision is centered around improving the lives of people and communities, and strengthening partnerships between all levels of government, and between these governments and Indigenous peoples. The key principles in the *NHS* are: housing in Canada ought to be safe, affordable and accessible to all people; housing investments ought to prioritize vulnerable populations, such as seniors, Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities; housing policy ought to be inclusive and non-discriminatory, and policymakers ought to be accountable to the public and encourage participation (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 5). Moreover, the *NHS* acknowledges that housing does not exist in a silo and that "[h]ousing programs should align with public investments in job creation, skills training, transit, early learning, healthcare, and cultural and recreational infrastructure (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 5). Further, the *NHS* states that housing investments must conform to Canada's climate change goals, as well as the Canadian government's commitment to building more sustainable communities. Lastly, the *NHS* points to community housing as an integral component of Canada's housing system, one that must be "prioritized, protected and grown" (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 5).

In the Preamble of the *NHS Act*, it is acknowledged that “improved housing outcomes are best achieved through cooperation between governments and civil society as well as the meaningful involvement of local communities.” This cooperation between governments takes the form of the National Housing Co-Investment Fund; a program designed to “maximize investments, ensure coordination of efforts, and remove barriers to the development process” (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 10). Provincial and municipal governments can contribute to the Fund through the contribution of land, inclusionary zoning provisions and “accelerated municipal approval processes”, as well as “waiving of development charges and fees, tax rebates, and other government loans” (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 10). Beyond that, the federal government has pledged \$20.5 billion in support to provinces and territories, to be accompanied by approximately \$9 billion in cost-matching from the provinces and territories (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 16). The ways in which local communities and society at large will be involved in the *NHS* will be discussed in detail later.

Further, the *NHS Act* states that a national housing strategy “would contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations” and “would support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Canada is party” (Preamble). These commitments are important, as they provide a framework for imagining what the housing future of Canada may look like, and provide standards to which the government can be held accountable. That said, the *NHS Act* employs language such as ‘contribute to meeting’ and ‘support the progressive realization of the right to housing,’ which may hedge commitments to furthering access to safe and affordable housing. It is important, for example, for the federal government not only to *support* progressive realization of the right to housing, but contribute directly to this goal. Moreover, the ways in which even such goals are to be realized are not discussed in detail in either the *NHS Act* or the *NHS*.

Finally, the *NHS Act* discusses the importance of providing “participatory processes to ensure the ongoing inclusion and engagement of civil society, stakeholders, vulnerable groups and persons with lived experience of housing need, as well as those with lived experience of homelessness” (s2(d)). This engagement will be

partially realized through the development of a Community-Based Tenant Initiative, which will “provide funding to local organizations that assist people in housing need”, ensuring that those with lived experience of housing precarity are able to participate in policy and decision-making (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 9). The inclusion of marginalized people in housing policymaking will also be supported by the Federal Housing Advocate, who will identify systemic barriers in housing through community engagement and provide advice to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 9). In addition, the *NHS* commits the government to reducing chronic homelessness by 50% through the investment of \$2.2 billion over the course of ten years; funding that will be directed towards interventions into homelessness as well as preventative strategies (Government of Canada 2017, p. 18). Finally, the *NHS* will utilize a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) framework in order to ensure that the *NHS* will benefit women, survivors of family violence, newcomers to Canada, seniors, and people with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2017, pp. 24-26).

While the goals and ideas outlined in the *NHS* and the *NHS Act* are laudable, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (2019) cautions that “[i]t is not clear that the National Housing Strategy will reduce the prevalence of housing need relative to 2017 levels” (p. 1). This is because the *NHS* largely maintains current levels of funding, despite being marketed as a “\$40-billion federal investment” (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019, p. 8). Indeed, the *NHS* only commits \$16.1 billion in new federal spending; the remaining \$23.4 billion is made up of existing loans, new loans, existing planned spending, and cost-matching required from the provinces and territories (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019, p. 8). Moreover, the cost-matching program implemented in the *NHS* may actually result in a reduction in provincial and territorial spending on housing, as many provinces and territories spend more on housing than the federal government. As a result, select provinces and territories “could reduce funding for housing programs while still meeting the cost-matching requirements and having all outputs of their programs counted towards the positive impacts of the *National Housing Strategy*” (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019, p. 8). Moreover, the *NHS* as originally developed actually reduced targeted funding for those in core housing need, meaning that those in the greatest

housing precarity will be receiving less aid from the federal government (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019, p. 23).

#### *4.1.3.3 Immigration Policy*

There are four primary policies and programs that govern the entry of refugees and immigrants into Canada, and the kinds of social support they receive once they arrive. First among these is the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (the *IRPA*). According to Section 3 of the *Act*, the objectives of immigration into Canada are as follows: (a) enriching Canada's economy, as well as its social and cultural life; (b) respecting and strengthening the multicultural nature of Canada; (c) to support the development of the Canadian economy; and (d) to see that families are reunited in Canada. It also makes demands of immigrants themselves. That is, the *Act* stipulates that "integration [into Canadian society] involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society" (3e).

Section 2 of the *IRPA* outlines the objectives for refugees coming into Canada. The primary objective of welcoming refugees into Canada is to save lives and offer "protection to the displaced and persecuted" (2(a)). Moreover, Canada aims "to offer safe haven to persons with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group, as well as those at risk of torture or cruel and unusual treatment or punishment" (2(d)). The final objective with regards to refugees is "to support the self-sufficiency and the social and economic well-being of refugees by facilitating reunification with their family members in Canada" (2(f)).

Despite the benefits of migration outlined above, and the supposed benevolence of Canada towards refugees, the *IRPA* treats immigrants and refugees with suspicion, discussing the importance of "protect[ing] public health and safety and maintain[ing] the security of Canadian society" (3(h)). The *Act* also outlines the Canadian government's commitment to "protect public health and safety and maintain justice and security by fostering respect for human rights and denying access to Canadian territory to persons who are criminals or security risks" (3(i)). Implicit in these statements is the assumption

that immigrants and refugees may represent a threat to public health, to the safety of Canadians, and to the security of the border. Indeed, the ‘protection’ element of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* seems to focus on protecting Canadians from the threat of migration, not on protecting the wellbeing of immigrants and refugees once they arrive in Canada. This kind of stigmatizing language is disappointing, given the necessity of immigrants to Canadian society, as outlined earlier in the *Act*.

Another important program that governs the lives of refugees in Canada is the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) Program. This program is designed to serve refugees who have been referred for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (Government of Canada, Dec. 9, 2019). The GAR Program is designed to provide support for Government-Assisted Refugees for up to one year after they first arrive in Canada, or until they become self-supporting (Government of Canada Dec. 9, 2019). This support may come in the form of assistance at the airport or port of entry, a temporary place to live, help with finding permanent housing, and basic household items (Government of Canada, Feb. 6, 2017). As refugees cannot depend on this program long-term, there is a massive push for them to become self-supporting shortly after their arrival, regardless of what they endured before coming to Canada.

The Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership is a program implemented in 2019 that is explicitly designed to aid LGBTQ refugees. It provides them with three-months income, and support with covering start-up costs once coming to Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020). This partnership assists 15 to 50 refugees a year (Government of Canada, June 2019a). It is important to note that Canada accepted 30,087 total refugees in 2019, so SOGIE refugees settled through this program represent a tiny proportion of total refugees (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2020). The Partnership differs from the GAR program in that the refugees this program assists are not sponsored by the government, but by private citizens. According to Ahmed Hussen, the former Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, due to the “unimaginable circumstances” LGBTQ2 refugees face, Canada has pledged to “protect them and help them feel safe” (Government of Canada, June 2019a). This pledge seems to be at odds with the time-limited nature of this assistance,

as three months affords little time to recover from ‘unimaginable circumstances’, let alone become self-supporting.

This said, the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership is in line with the federal government’s broader Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach, defined as an “intersectional analytical process used to examine how sex and gender intersect with other identity factors...that may impact the effectiveness of government initiatives” (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2020, p. 25). Indeed, the federal government recognizes that LGBTQ2 refugees may experience unique barriers to settlement, which it plans to address using various methods, including “developing enhanced knowledge of country conditions and training for IRCC staff on gender inclusion, diversity and cultural awareness” (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2020, p. 29). However, this training does little good for all the SOGIE refugees who are unable to seek asylum in Canada due to the limited number of people granted entry through the Partnership.

The final program offered to immigrants at the federal level is the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). The RAP has two primary components: income support and assistance with immediate essential services. An immediate essential service is classified as a service that an immigrant will require within the first four to six weeks of living in Canada. This could take the form of an orientation to Canada, life skills training, or a referral to other settlement programs. RAP also provides basic and conditional income supports, which can include one-time assistance with items such as seasonal clothing, furniture, linens, or aid with utilities and telephone bills (Government of Canada, June 2019b). Beyond that, RAP recipients receive monthly income support that “aims to be in accordance with the prevailing basic social assistance rates in the client’s province of residence” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019, p. 69). However, much like the GAR Program, RAP is also time-limited, providing assistance for only 12 months (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019), meaning that refugees are under pressure to become ‘self-sufficient’ very soon after arrival. Indeed, while the Canadian government discusses at length the importance of migration for Canada, once refugees arrive here, they are afforded aid that expires after a mere 12 months.



#### 4.1.4 International policy analysis

##### *4.1.4.1 Introduction*

At the international level, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights provides guidance surrounding both the right to housing and the protection of LGBTQ people globally. It emphasizes that international law requires that all people are able to access safe, adequate, and stable housing in the country in which they live and that they experience freedom from persecution based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender expression. While these requirements are laudable and represent an important step in achieving a more equitable world, in reality international standards surrounding the right to housing and the treatment of LGBTQ people are often not met by the states that are tasked with implementing them. Considerably more work is required to ensure that all people can access adequate housing and experience safety from persecution.

##### *4.1.4.2 The right to housing*

The right to housing is enshrined under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, encompassed within the broader right to an adequate standard of living. This right also includes adequate clothing, access to food, and the continuous improvement of one's living conditions. As such, it makes sense that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that the right to housing ought to be interpreted in an expansive sense to guarantee access to safe, affordable and adequate housing to as many people as possible globally. Specifically, the right to housing should not be seen as encompassing only shelter (that is, a roof over one's head) but "as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity" (OHCHR, 2009, p. 3).

The right to housing encompasses security of tenure, which means that residents have a right to "legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats" (OHCHR, 2009, p. 4). It also includes a right to "safe drinking water, adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other

threats to health and structural hazards” (OHCHR, 2009, p. 4). Further, the right to housing encompasses metrics like affordability (meaning that the cost of housing cannot be so expensive that it compromises one’s ability to meet other basic needs), habitability (meaning that housing must be able to weather the heat and cold, as well as provide adequate space), and accessibility (meaning that housing must be accessible to marginalized groups, including people with disabilities). Accessibility also means that housing must be considered culturally adequate – a space where residents can express their cultural identity in peace and without fear of persecution. Finally, the right to housing dictates that housing must be located close to health care services, childcare, and opportunities for employment and education, and away from dangerous areas.

In practice, many individuals remain unable to secure safe, adequate and stable housing. Unfortunately, this is especially true for refugees, immigrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially those living in urban areas. Often, immigrants, refugees and IDPs live in insecure and overcrowded conditions because they are unable to find adequate housing (OHCHR, 2009). When employed as domestic labourers or factory workers, members of this group can sometimes end up living at their place of work due to inadequate labour protections. This can result in “living in overcrowded dormitories, sleeping in shifts and [living] without access to adequate sanitation” (OHCHR, 2009, p. 25). Such conditions compromise the safety and dignity of those who must live under them.

At worst, the right to housing for refugees, immigrants and IDPs is compromised to such an extent that they become homeless. This is especially true for migrants without legal status, who are unable to challenge discriminatory or otherwise exploitative housing practices, leaving them vulnerable to losing their housing, and unable to access legal remedies. Moreover, immigrants without legal status are often excluded from national housing strategies and other housing-related policies (OHCHR, 2009).

#### *4.1.4.3 LGBTQ rights*

In addition to the right to housing to which all people are entitled, the United Nations advises states regarding how LGBTQ people’s rights can be protected and upheld.

Specifically, the UN recommends that all states take measures to: ensure that LGBTQ people are protected from violence; prevent the torture of LGBTQ people; repeal laws that criminalize LGBTQ people; prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity; and safeguard LGBTQ people's freedoms of expression and assembly (OHCHR, 2019, p. 7). In addition to these rights, LGBTQ refugees are protected under Article 14(a) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which dictates that all people have "the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Moreover, all states that signed the *1952 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (the *Convention*) have the duty to accept refugees (including LGBTQ refugees) fleeing persecution, regardless of whether the grounds for such persecution are 'actual' or 'perceived'. For example, in certain instances the mere existence of a law that criminalizes LGBTQ people can be considered the basis for an asylum claim, as opposed to an individualized fear or experience of persecution (Vitikainen, 2020, p. 66).

This duty to accept refugees also means that they "should not be penalized for their illegal entry or stay" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). Indeed, the *Convention* recognizes that seeking asylum from discrimination, disadvantage, or violence often requires the breaking of rules and laws surrounding migration (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). Finally, states are prohibited from expelling any person if they face the threat of torture or other danger in their country of origin. This is the principle of non-refoulement, which stipulates that "no one shall expel or return...a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3). While this principle protects refugees who seek asylum for any reason, it also specifically ensures that LGBTQ refugees will not be sent back to states where they fear homo-, bi-, or transphobia.

That said, even signatory states often fall short of the standards set by the UN. This is because officials may "have little knowledge or sensitivity towards conditions facing [LGBTQ] people, and may impose intrusive, humiliating and inappropriate requirements to establish the credibility of their claim" (OHCHR, 2019, p. 21). In the United States, there have been noted instances of homo-, bi-, and transphobic behaviour from officials at asylum facilities, up to and including harassment. As such,

even though international law includes both specific protections for LGBTQ refugees and general protections for all refugees, the treatment of LGBTQ people does not always meet these standards.

Finally, the UN recognizes that LGBTQ people face heightened instances of discrimination in housing, and therefore their right to housing requires additional protection (OHCHR 2019). Indeed, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires states to adopt measures that prevent discrimination, which means that they must ensure that “individuals and entities in the private sphere do not discriminate on prohibited grounds, including sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics” (OHCHR, 2019, p. 65). Despite these stipulations, LGBTQ people continue to experience discrimination in housing (Lyons et al., 2019; Kattari et al., 2016). As such, individuals facing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity are also more likely to be homeless (OHCHR, 2019). Again, despite these specific and general protections in place to prevent harm, discrimination and persecution persist, which means more (effective) measures must be taken to ensure LGBTQ people are actually being protected globally.

#### *4.1.4.4 Conclusion*

As demonstrated in this section, despite a wealth of policy-making surrounding housing and migration, the ability of LGBTQ refugees (and Albertans more generally) to secure safe, adequate, and affordable housing in Alberta remains compromised. There are myriad reasons for this policy failure, including (but not limited to) abysmal social assistance rates, time-limited social assistance, a dearth of affordable housing and inadequate federal spending with regards to housing. Such failures ensure that the intersectional needs of LGBTQ refugees remain unmet (and largely unaddressed), and that many Albertans exist in a state of housing precarity. This is not to say that the state of housing in Alberta cannot change, however. By challenging the issues that currently plague Alberta’s housing system, we could build an Alberta that is more just and equitable for all people, including LGBTQ refugees. Indeed, the strong international protections around both adequate housing and LGBTQ rights—although they have yet

to be implemented in Alberta—provide a moral and legal foundation from which to challenge these issues.

## 4.2 Key Informant Interviews

### 4.2.1 Introduction

I conducted a series of key informant interviews with participants working in the housing system, refugee- and LGBTQ-focused service providers, as well as academics. They provided invaluable insight into the shortcomings and strengths of existing policies. The following section explores the responses they gave during the interview process, focusing on refugee experiences in Alberta, structural inequalities that exist across various sectors, as well as the experiences of tenants in Alberta's housing system.

### 4.2.2 Refugee experiences in Alberta

SOGIE refugees can experience barriers that are separate from, and often encountered prior to, the process of securing housing. These barriers include the difficulties present in the IRB adjudication process, the cultural shock that comes with moving to an entirely new country, and (especially) the lack of support available to refugee claimants. While these experiences are not directly related to the housing system, they nonetheless inform how refugees experience life in Alberta and Canada, and shape how they will interact with and navigate other systems (including housing).

#### 4.2.2.1 IRB Adjudication

Participants working in the refugee-serving sector identified the process of IRB Adjudication as one with many barriers. These barriers flowed from the onus placed on claimants to 'prove' their sexual orientations, as well as the length of the process itself. Proving to adjudicators that one is indeed queer or trans can be difficult due to the limited understanding of queerness employed by the IRB. Indeed, the process of proving one's sexual orientation or gender can be very distressing for claimants:

[P2] Yeah, they pretty much have to prove that they're gay or lesbian. Or trans. Like you, you have to do all this stuff to prove that you're, you know, the way you are. And that process...it's just horrific. It's so dehumanizing, like it's just so...yeah.

To help claimants 'prove' their SOGIE identities, LGBTQ organizations in Canada sometimes issue letters of support. It is important to note that these organizations are not 'verifying' the sexual orientations and genders of claimants, but rather helping them move through adjudication:

[P5] I worked at [a LGBTQ-serving organization] for a number of years, and we would often get folks coming in saying—and you could just tell that they were like, exhausted—that they were just trying to get through this process. And they were like, 'I've been told by my immigration lawyer that I need to make connection to the gay community here. So I'm here at the [organization].' And we would be like, 'Yeah, we'll help you in any way we can, like will vouch for you, we'll do this, we'll do that.' The system is ridiculous.

[P6] Okay, so what happened is that the [LGBTQ-serving organization] sends the support letter, and the people who are representing it signed off the support letter: 'This person, we know this person, this person is part of the community.' But it's not a verification, we cannot put it this way. So that, you know, it's just a support letter for this person, stating that they are part of the community, they know them. And that helps them when they are having their hearings that, 'oh, they have support from [the organization]. They are LGBTQ because they are part of a community organization.'

The kinds of disclosure that the IRB requires can be very traumatic for claimants, whether they are making these disclosures during adjudication, or to a support worker as they prepare for adjudication. Occasionally, these disclosures are the first time they have ever spoken about their experiences out loud:

[P4] And many times, we will be the first one to hear their like full life story. And it can be traumatic, you know, and sometimes they will start like crying or something like that. And then we will just have to postpone that meeting for a few days or a few weeks.

In addition to having to prove their sexual orientation, SOGIE claimants must also prove that they faced persecution in their country of origin. However, experiences of discrimination can be difficult to prove. Claimants are forced to navigate a tension wherein they have to prove that the discrimination they faced in their country of origin was dangerous enough that they had to flee, but that they nonetheless engaged in a verifiable 'queer lifestyle' while living under the persistent threat of discrimination:

[P5] One of the more sort of perplexing things is that you have this situation where people have to portray that their countries of origin were so homophobic and transphobic, that they felt a certain level of like fear and threat, or they experienced a certain kind of violence or discrimination. At the same time, they had to demonstrate ... or had to prove that they were, in fact, queer, trans and—obviously not using that language—it was very like, 'gay or straight?' So the way they had to like prove that they were gay, was that they had to have relationships. So you have this like situation where people are expected to tell a story that their country of origin was deeply homophobic or transphobic. But at the same time, they managed to have relationships, and they managed to engage in gay sex.

The process of adjudication can also be arduous simply because it can take many months to complete; the entire process from beginning to end can sometimes take over a year. Moreover, the length of time an application will take to process can be quite unpredictable, leaving claimants with little certainty throughout the process:

[P4] For example, I moved to Canada in 2016. And because of like, Christmas holidays, my claim was like [submitted on] January 17. And then I got a hearing on March 20. Okay, like exactly three months, right? And then in 2017, after Trump getting into [power in the] US, you know, so many people—especially undocumented immigrants from the US, they just let them cross the border and they claim for refugee. So because of some bilateral agreement between the US and Canada, anyone who makes a claim is like priority. For example, today I'm from Russia, and I will be number 27 on the waiting list, and but like, if 40 people from the US enter Canada today, I will go to 67 right, because they will be they have priority. And because the number of people who moved from the US was enormous, it created a lot of mess and delays and everything. Then COVID happened and let's say the latest trends [in waiting for a hearing] are something like 10 months, okay. But you know, it's really unpredictable it can take more, it can take like less, right? But let's say like 10 months.

[P4] Yeah, I'd say like year to 14 months. And then like, you know, after the hearing, two options are there. They can be accepted, if they're accepted, they are eligible to apply for permanent residency. And then like, after a while, they're eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship. If they are rejected, they can appeal.

#### *4.2.2.2 Acculturation*

Throughout the interviews, some participants identified a kind of 'cultural dissonance' or 'cultural clash' experienced by their clients upon their arrival, with respect to understandings of LGBTQ+ identities in Canada. This kind of dissonance is often due in



part to the Canadian immigration system's very rigid and restrictive understanding of queerness, which makes the experience of IRB Adjudication difficult (as noted above). Specifically, because the IRB relies heavily on a Western conception of queerness, proving one's sexual orientation or gender identity can be quite difficult for claimants whose queerness does not fit into this Eurocentric mould. The IRB's limited understanding of queerness means that the ways in which the adjudicators understand LGBTQ identity may not be consistent with the ways in which claimants understand their own sexual or gender identities. Rendering their sexuality or gender identity intelligible for adjudicators can sometimes prove difficult for SOGIE claimants, leading to criticism of the ways in which Western conceptions of queerness are often treated as more 'legitimate' or 'real':

[P5] If somebody was like, 'I'm bisexual', and they had only ever been with folks not of their gender, then it wasn't believed that they were bisexual until they actually had interaction of somebody with, like, the 'same sex' ... because that's not how that works... Like, why are we so fixated on somebody being authentic in a certain kind of way? And what does that do to like, shore up or like, strengthen notions of like, Western colonial sexuality as being true, right, or the proper way? Or the only way? Or the most legitimate? And all those sorts of things?

Another participant described how they help clients navigate IRB adjudication, explaining that a significant part of their job is aiding claimants in selecting 'ideal evidence' for adjudication. In other words, they help clients select evidence that will render their case intelligible to the IRB. Instances of discrimination or violence that may be ubiquitous in a client's country of origin, and therefore taken for granted by that client, are often important to include in an application. The toll that this kind of disclosure can take on participants will be discussed further in section 4.2.2:

[P4] You know, the tricky part is, like, people don't know why they have to put in basis of claim. Especially people who came from countries where LGBT people are not accepted. They will take so many things for granted. You know, they will think, 'Oh, I was beaten' or 'I wasn't able to find a proper job', but they will never think about it as something related to their sexual orientation... You know, it's like, there are so many times, so many times I've heard from women, especially from African countries, with high rates of sexual violence. So I will learn about like her private life, girl, then blah, blah, blah. And then just like, out of the blue you know, [she will say] 'they attacked me...they raped me'. Yeah. And I will be like, shocked and like, 'why didn't you tell me that earlier?' And, you know, like so many of them will be like, 'oh, you know, like, my mother was raped, my sister was raped'. So in many cultures, it's not like a big deal, right? Like this is not important. So, you know, we will give them time to like, [process] what's like happened there and to make the claim as strong as we can. And also to bring some evidence, which is a very important part of every refugee claim.

Once LGBTQ refugees are living in Canada, the experience of being 'out' and open about their sexuality and gender identity can be quite overwhelming. It can be difficult for newcomers to navigate Canadian culture, including the housing system, as a newly 'out' LGBTQ person:

[P2] It's really easy to get overwhelmed when you first get here, because all of a sudden, you maybe you're coming from a country where you are put to death, yeah, for being the way you are. Here, all of a sudden, you know, you're wide open. And I've seen a lot of individuals get so overwhelmed with that new freedom, because also they can date, they can be themselves, they can, you know, there's all these things. But then it gets so a lot of individuals, they get that overwhelmed. They can't navigate the systems properly, right. And so they don't get proper information about housing or like you said, if something goes wrong in the apartment, they don't necessarily have resources to guide them through that.

Or I've also seen where all of a sudden, there was this new freedom. There was some of the guys they're hooking up a lot, right, and then we run into problems with you know, sexual health and, and some mental health stuff or in assault right there. And so you know, there can be there's a dark side to that as well. And I also work with a lot of guys in the sex trade in the city, this year especially I saw a huge influx of newcomers. And so, again, it was because most lost their job and so forth and the market is there to sell sex, even though they may not want to, but they needed to survive. But yes, there was a quite a big increase in those members, right? For sex work.

#### *4.2.2.3 Refugee claimants in Canada*

Refugee experiences can be diverse, with those who make claims within Canada having different challenges from those who apply outside of the country (i.e., as Government-Assisted Refugees or Privately-Sponsored Refugees). This is because refugee claimants within Canada are generally unable to access any form of social support until their claim has been submitted. In practice, this means they could be living for months without access to proper supports, related to housing or otherwise. As a result, many refugee claimants must wait in emergency shelters until their claim is processed:

[P6] So imagine if you're a refugee claimant and you come to Edmonton. You don't have a place to stay there, no money, you're staying at a shelter. You need to come to our organization, meet with me, help you with the forms, putting everything together can take one week. Imagine one week to put your refugee claim together, and then three to four weeks to ... submit their claim, you know, and then you need to wait one week or two weeks after to get our Alberta Income Support, then you have money to do something.

The general lack of support available to refugee claimants before their claim is submitted means that they end up 'falling through the cracks' of various systems. This demographic is frequently left with little support, rendering day-to-day existence exceedingly difficult:

[P4] We learn about particular vulnerabilities of certain groups of newcomers, and we found, for example, some of them, they simply fall through the cracks of the system, you know? For example, they can't get any financial support...undocumented immigrants. Like if you don't exist, how can you get any support [that] exists? I mean, you're not recognized within that system, you know? Like nothing, no social insurance numbers, something like that.

This participant then went on to identify inadequate health care coverage as one of the many cracks that refugee claimants can fall through. This means that they may end up paying out of pocket for health-related expenses, which can be extremely costly:

[P4] Some obstacles are there...they have so called interim health coverage...So it's only for like basic, super basic things...I have a client, she's a cancer patient. And every four months, she has to pay \$700 for her treatment, and for her it's like too much.

In addition, refugee claimants are unable to access legal aid in Alberta—unlike in many other provinces—until after their claim is submitted. What this means in practice is that they cannot access an attorney during a period where they require legal advice to prepare their claim. In this case, refugee-serving organizations step in to fill the gap:

[P6] [I]n Alberta, we don't have that support, you need to submit your claim. First, you need to submit your forms for your eligibility interview, and then you can ask legal aid to support you with hiring a lawyer for you.

[P4] And there [at IRB adjudication] you have to explain what's happened to you, why you are here in Calgary, you're not able to return to your country. And I think like the average price for this, done by lawyer is, for example, \$4,000. People don't have that money. They cannot. They cannot approach a lawyer before they submit a claim. In Alberta—Legal Aid Alberta is here in Calgary—they provide support for refugee hearings. But the eligibility criteria is that you already have your claim submitted.

Another barrier experienced by refugee claimants is their inability to register for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes, which are English language classes. English language proficiency is pivotal to newcomers' success in English-speaking regions of Canada, and the inability to enroll in LINC classes poses a substantial barrier. A lack of English language proficiency can also pose difficulty to LGBTQ refugees who seek to establish ties to the LGBTQ community here:

[P4] But they are not able to attend LINC classes. Which is very stupid. Because, like, if somebody needs LINC classes level 1-4 It means they don't speak like any English, right? And it will be very hard for them to find any job. It's not good to be here in Alberta, right? They cannot, they can take only like short courses, like up to six months. Everything else will be considered like some kind of educational program. So they will be recognized as international students, and then they have to pay like, twice or three times more.

[P4] And then if you don't speak English, for example, you simply are not familiar with LGBT culture here. You will not be like confident to approach mainstream

LGBT organizations. Simply you don't know. And very often, people don't have that idea at all, you know, like, why I have to call Pride, why I have to call any organization, you know, they don't share that idea. So, basically, it was really really hard for them to navigate what to do and how to get any kind of connection.

It is also important to note that there are, at times, waitlists for LINC classes. This is largely dependent on where the classes are offered, if childcare is provided, and similar factors:

[P6] There is a waiting list, however, like it's a short waiting list. You know, and it depends which school, or like one centre has like different schools, right. And they have waiting list to access. And especially now with COVID, it's online, so there is limited people that can be online.

[P1] Especially since the learning English programs can have like a two-year waitlist so not sure how everyone is expected to do everything in a year when they can't even access the programming they're supposed to be able to.

Ultimately, participants stressed that refugees face various unique barriers after coming to Canada (including while preparing claims in Canada)—in addition to general barriers within the housing system, around affordability and discrimination, for example. These barriers can be attributed to factors such as ideology (such as that governing the IRB Adjudication process) and a general lack of support experienced by refugees, especially refugee claimants. Indeed, the interviews have highlighted that the barriers experienced by LGBTQ refugees are intersectional, and created through systems such as homophobia (represented here in the ideology employed by the IRB), but also neoliberal capitalism (represented here by the lack of aid--financial or otherwise--available to refugee claimants). It was clear that refugees are a population that

continues to experience myriad vulnerabilities in Canada and Alberta, despite their prioritization in documents such as the *NHS*.

#### *4.2.2.4 Discrimination*

Discrimination was one of the most prominent themes in the interviews, mentioned by seven of eight participants. Interviewees offered varying perspectives on the issue; some highlighting how pervasive discrimination is within housing, as well as the complex ways in which discrimination plays out in the housing and shelter systems; others emphasizing that discrimination is exceedingly hard to prove or act upon, and that a narrow focus on discrimination alone will fall short of getting individuals into the housing they require. It is important to note that participants occupy very different roles within the housing system, and LGBTQ- and refugee-serving sectors—some working directly with clients, some working in policymaking, and some working in academia. As such, their perspectives on discrimination are distinct, with limited overlap. This section seeks to highlight these differences in perspectives, rather than minimize them. Importantly, all seven of the participants who spoke about this issue agreed that discrimination occurs and is relevant to understanding the complex experiences of LGBTQ refugees in the housing system.

Many interviewees were quick to acknowledge that discrimination is multifaceted, and to truly understand the experiences of LGBTQ refugees (and other people) in the housing system, we must take an intersectional approach. Participants often brought up the concept of intersectionality without prompting, making it clear that this was an important lens through which they understood their work and the kinds of discrimination their clients face.

The ways in which intersectional discrimination plays out in the shelter system was highlighted, with many queer individuals experiencing multiple axes of oppression, rendering homeless shelters unsafe:

[P2] So you know, a lot of our folk—this is really evident in shelter systems—you know, say you're Indigenous [and] trans. Quite often, the slander and oppression towards those individuals is really high. Because of their race and because of being trans, for example. And so I hear a lot of stories around where it's not just because they're trans, but it's also because they're Indigenous, right?

[P2] Most don't feel safe going to shelters because of you know, transphobia, homophobia, racism. And so they go to the shelters, and they get teased, they get beat up, and so forth. And so it's a lot safer just to sleep rough on the street. And that in itself, you know, it affects your mental health. You're always on guard, even on the street, and stuff like that. So yeah, pretty much all our folk ... do not go to the shelter when they're homeless.

This understanding of intersectional oppression that clients face was echoed by another participant, working within the housing system and refugee-serving sector. They discussed the ways in which the discrimination and stigma faced by their clients is multifaceted, relating to factors such as disability, racialization, sexual orientation and refugee status. These intersecting identities, and the stigma associated with them, presented barriers to accessing housing:

[P4] And it was like, really challenging for many newcomers, and especially, you know, newcomers with different identities that can make them more vulnerable. Like being a Black person and LGBTQ person, and maybe like some disabilities there. So it was like, really, really, hard. We heard about, for example, homophobic-like attacks or something racist.

[P4] Like some of our clients, they heard 'I don't want Black people here.' Or sometimes [landlords] wanted to learn more about like, 'Where you are from?'



which is okay you know.... So they ask them 'Oh, why are you here?' And they say, 'Well, I'm gay, looking for asylum.' And people were like 'No...we don't want gay people', or something. So it became pretty much...hard.

As a support worker trying to help individuals navigate Alberta's housing system, this participant was confronted with the intersectional discrimination faced by their clients, as well as the difficulties this discrimination poses to helping their clients find housing. Through the interviews, it became clear that discrimination is an issue at many different points along the housing continuum, not just in the emergency shelter system.

Discrimination is also present in systems such as policing and border services. Another participant discussed the ways in which racialized queer people and refugees experience discrimination while dealing with police and border services agents, and the ways in which the intersectional discrimination these groups experience is frequently not believed by white Canadians:

[P5] You have folks arriving from different countries who are saying like, you know, because they're racialized, police in Canada and Border Services have, as you said, like targeted and surveilled or interacted with or harassed them. And at the same time, what we found is there's this weird, not weird, but there's this sort of current of thought in gay communities in Canada that the refugee claimants are reacting to and displacing the violence they experienced in their countries of origin in relation to the police on to Canadian police forces. So their argument is, 'You're reacting to trauma from your homophobic police organizations in your country of origin and you're displacing it onto Canadian police. Canadian police are fine. You know, there's a few bad apples, but they're okay.' And so we really look into like, what is this? What is this moment? Why is this happening? What are all these sort of pieces at play here? For how it is that that gay, predominantly white Canadians are so just averse to looking critically at police

organizations understanding that, like, folks who are new to this country have legitimate concerns about the police in Canada, but it's not a trauma reaction, right?

While participants acknowledged that intersectional discrimination is an issue that LGBTQ refugees (and many other groups) face, it was clear that this is not a sentiment shared by all Canadians, and the issue of discrimination is often not given the attention it deserves. Moreover, it is important to consider the ways in which interactions with the police and border services—as well as with skeptical Canadians—affect the ways in which LGBTQ refugees interact with other systems in Canada.

On a related note, the ways in which queer communities in Canada are not always accepting of LGBTQ newcomers was highlighted. Some LGBTQ Canadians can be perpetrators of discrimination and buy into racist and xenophobic stereotypes about LGBTQ refugees:

[P5] [During IRB adjudication] they had to demonstrate knowledge or connection with the gay communities in the cities in which they lived in Canada, right? So it was things like, they would be asked questions about Toronto Pride, or they'd be asked about different organizations if they were in Toronto and these sorts of things to prove this connection. We can all sort of imagine—or [by] listening to their stories—that they're arriving in a new country, they're going through this extremely arduous refugee process. They are coming from a place where they experienced like, danger and violence and discrimination, and they're being asked to make connections to Canadian communities. And a lot of them reported that the Canadian communities were racist and xenophobic, and didn't embrace them.

Participants also discussed how LGBTQ refugees often cannot connect with *their* cultural communities in Canada, due to persistent homo-, bi-, and transphobia. These cultural communities could comprise people from the same country or region of origin, from the same religious community, and/or from the same ethnic group. This form of rejection could compound with exclusion from Canadian queer communities to leave LGBTQ refugees with few places to turn:

[P4] For many LGBT claimants, they're not...they don't feel safe in cultural communities. They don't feel safe to approach them. Like say religious communities, for example, somebody who is from the area can be a little bit hesitant to approach like the Nigerian Christian Church, or whatever. But you know, for people who are new to Canada, those spaces are something to meet new people and to make connections, to create some networks. But we noticed, no, it doesn't work for many of them [LGBT refugees].

[P4] People in many cultures and communities, they know like, here we cannot hurt them. We can't say anything bad like, you know, 'all you f\*ggots will burn in hell' or something. But this does not mean LGBTQ people will be like accepted or welcomed by their cultural communities.

Due to this persistent homo-, bi-, and transphobia that persists within some cultural communities, LGBTQ refugees may not feel comfortable approaching LGBTQ-serving organizations, due to the fear that someone from their cultural community will see them entering such a facility and discriminate against them because of this:

[P4] Yeah, how many people, they were not—they didn't feel safe to approach that space physically, right? Because they were scared to meet someone from their cultural community and like, how will they explain why they are here?

[P6] So when I came to Canada, for example, I came from Syria as a refugee. I wanted to be connected to the LGBTQ community. However, I didn't know how. So one day I searched like how to connect to the LGBT community. And then I found about [LGBTQ-serving organization]. Right? I was like, yeah, that is great. It's a great organization. But for people that was afraid to go to [LGBTQ-serving organization]? Because what if one of my ethnocultural community sees me going to the [LGBTQ-serving organization]?

It is also mentioned that LGBTQ refugees seldom select Calgary as their first choice city when coming to Canada, due to the feeling that it does not have the same kind of LGBTQ services or infrastructure as cities like Vancouver or Toronto – which are known, in part, for their large LGBTQ communities. This relative lack of queer community, when combined with exclusion from cultural communities, means LGBTQ refugees do not know where to turn to make connections:

[P4] [Calgary] is a big city, like regarding how many people live here and everything. But all that like LGBT infrastructure is not developed as in Toronto, or something like that. So basically, you know, as I mentioned, let's say I'm LGBT—for example, I came from Tanzania, I find myself in Calgary, and what can I do? I speak English, like a low level of English, I don't know how to explain my situation. So where can I go? If I go and approach my cultural community—wherever it may be—it can bring a certain risk because many immigrants do not like [LGBT people]. They can live in Canada for many years—but their mindset is the same.

Despite the pervasiveness of discrimination in Canada, a couple of participants identified the limited interventions available for people experiencing discrimination. Although discrimination is illegal in housing and employment, it is exceedingly difficult to prove discrimination, providing little recourse to victims of discrimination. As such,

rights-based frameworks and anti-discrimination laws can fall short of helping individuals experiencing discrimination:

[P8] Look at the bigger picture—even in market housing—landlords aren't allowed to discriminate... [but they do], they just don't give you housing. There's no documentation. Like they don't write down their decision.

[P5] People talk a lot about discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and all this sort of stuff. But you know—if you think you've been discriminated against or treated differently for any number of reasons, like, do you actually know what it takes to go through the human rights process? What it would take to go to the human rights tribunal – what that would look like, how costly it would be, what kind of evidence you would need, what time it would take? ...it's arduous and complicated, and multistep, and ... in the end, the solution is that they might pay you \$1,000, move the person to a different position, or mediate it in a way that's gratifying for everyone, right? And sort of thinking through human rights in this way—that we celebrate these huge moments like, you know, the Charter or getting different kinds of rights or something like same-sex marriage—[but] the ways in which it changes our lives is actually quite limited.

Proving discrimination can be difficult, in part, because it does not emerge exclusively in interpersonal relations (e.g., a landlord discriminating against a tenant), but is also *systemic* and deeply embedded in the ways that housing is delivered:

[P8] Oppression is like the water that we swim in, or the air that we breathe, it's like embedded in that. So, for example, you get points for children [in social housing], which means people are being discriminated against based on family status. So if you don't have children, you get less points...And of course, we know that discrimination operates through the invisible isolation of difference. So

for actually thinking about accessing housing, we might want to consider, you know, identity categories through which people are experiencing discrimination or oppression.

Other participants highlighted not only marginalized identities as sites of discrimination, but also source of income. They discussed the ways in which individuals on income support experience discrimination from landlords, due to stigma attached to being on social assistance. This discrimination is also important to consider in relation to LGBTQ refugees, as many refugees begin their time in Canada receiving some form of income support (through the PSR and GAR programs, for example). As such, LGBTQ refugees may experience compounding stigma when trying to access housing:

[P3] Oh, my god. That's like the number one thing when finding housing here, it's so hard to find housing, because the minute you say you're on income support, they'll hang up the call on you. You're on AISH. They'll just be like 'okay, I'll be back' and then put you on hold forever.

[P8] I can say that there's a sense that many people on AISH, or on social benefit, are you know, lazy, all those kinds of rhetoric of what people should or shouldn't be doing. And that has to play out in lots of ways of how applications and tenancies are processed. And even in how people are spoken to, which may make them check in less on if they're helping them or updating information less.

Participant P8 also pointed out that discrimination may not be handled well by housing management bodies, as they are not necessarily adept at dealing with social issues and may not have an employee who is trained in or available to deal with discrimination cases within a building. This lack of on-site support connects with the issue of the practical difficulties in enforcing of human rights in relation to discrimination claims:

[P8] Like how housing management bodies manage social issues, right? So what in the literature is called like anti-social behaviour—which is a term I hate—but if you think about folks who experience discrimination, if you have a neighbour who is saying mean things to you, oppressive things that make you feel unsafe, does that housing management body step in? And do they have the labour and the time that people need to do that? Is it their job? Or, you know, like I think that's something that housing management bodies, housing providers, haven't really grappled with, especially in bigger developments where they don't have someone on site.

Finally, one participant highlighted how landlords potentially engage in higher levels of discrimination while vacancy rates are low. In such situations, landlords are more likely to target marginalized groups—who already experience discrimination within housing—for eviction. In this sense, housing precarity connects not only to one's status as a renter, but potentially to one's sexual orientation, race, or other factors:

[P1] So in really high vacancy situations where you have a vacancy rate of like 10%, landlords are wanting to fill their units, so they may not be as discriminatory or give into their biases as much as they can do so with a really tight rental market.

[P1] Yeah, [landlords] will find something. They do that to people who are Indigenous all the time, or people on income support. You see it as the vacancy rates tighten up, and landlords are trying to get rid of tenants so they can re-rent the unit at a higher rate, or are less willing to take rent subsidies.

#### *4.2.2.5 Equity*

Equity was another theme that came up during the interview process, in relation to discussions of discrimination. Participants highlighted the ways in which discrimination

and inequity are still pervasive in Canada, but also pointed to the ways in which this may be changing. Several discussed the ways in which they believe society has become more equitable, as well as the feeling that there is a reckoning with some of the racism and homophobia present in Canada. While all participants identified systemic problems or challenges in Canadian society, there was a feeling among some that these issues are beginning to improve:

[P5] I think there's definitely moments of reckoning with like, the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] and Black Lives Matter movements and stuff saying, like, 'this isn't Canada.' When you say 'this isn't Canada' and when you say 'racism isn't part of the Canadian fabric' there's a complete reorienting, [because] like 'Canada was built on racism'.

[P2] We've come a long ways, for sure. I'm from a time when, you know, no one came out, right? In the 80s and 90s, it was still quite – you stayed in the closet, right? You didn't move in with your partner, or you had to be very secret. And nowadays, you know, it's different. You know, we have couples buy houses together, raising families together and stuff like that. So yeah, we've come a long ways for sure.

One participant also described the strong LGBTQ community in Alberta, which exists despite the province's often conservative politics. In this milieu, there are queer Albertans fighting for equity:

[P5] Just being in [the] queer and trans community here and realizing like how complicated—how sort of like layered and really amazing [the] queer and trans community can be here—within this sort of like pressure cooker of seemingly like, just dire, horrible, racist, homophobic, transphobic conservatism, like that there is this community that emerges. Anytime I can talk about or can look at



Alberta and present it in different ways, I tried to do that. I think that's just because like, yeah, this is my home and my community and being accountable for where I live and all those sorts of things.

The concept of 'trickle-up social justice', as developed by Dean Spade, was also highlighted as a means through which equity could be advanced. This strategy involves prioritizing the needs of the most marginalized first in fights for social justice and equity, as the positive benefits of this will 'trickle up' to more privileged groups:

[P5] So that's, that's what sort of Dean Spade talks about right is that ... the easiest piece [is] to just add to the top. You're just taking the people who have the most privilege and you're like giving them access to like everything that comes, you know, access to the systems and all of this. You're not addressing, and you're not helping, and you're actually like further excluding folks who are less privileged. And so I really like his way of thinking that, if you address the issues—and this is what he talks about, in terms of like trickle up social justice—if you solve the issues for folks who are most marginalized, you are going to end up solving the problems of the people who are privileged above them, right?

#### *4.2.2.6 Intersectionality*

Intersectionality was frequently spoken about in relation to discrimination but also policymaking and service provision. While intersectionality is a theoretical framework for this thesis, and therefore an integral part of my research, participants often brought it up without prompting, suggesting that it is an integral part of how they understand their work as well.

Participants often discussed how an intersectional approach was required to meet the needs of LGBTQ refugees. They spoke about a previous gap in service provision as

there were organizations available to newcomers or LGBTQ people in Alberta, but none that catered to the unique needs of LGBTQ newcomers.

[P6] So one day, I get the courage and went there, there was five people inside the centre. No one talked to me, right? No one acknowledged me. And I didn't feel welcome or included or anything. I didn't know what the [LGBTQ-serving organization] do... So that's my experience. There wasn't any service for people like me who are LGBTQ and newcomers. There was lack of support, you know, and culturally, relative support for this community.

However, since this participant's arrival in Canada, many LGBTQ- and refugee-serving organizations have created partnerships in order to meet the unique needs of LGBTQ refugees and newcomers. Participants discussed the ways in which newcomer-serving organizations have expanded their services to create centres for LGBTQ newcomers, as there was nowhere else for them to turn. These organizations were aware of, and intend to respond to, intersectional identities that produced a unique set of needs for each client. There was a general sense that each client possessed a complex set of experiences, challenges and goals, and that these needed to be approached in a holistic way:

[P6] A complex case is when there are multiple systems, okay. So, for example, let's talk about an LGBTQ newcomer person. So there is lots of layers for identity, right. And all of those layers intersect with each other, creating complex needs and things that they are facing. So, for example, first LGBTQ identity or sexual orientation. And then maybe newcomers that are from religious or cultural backgrounds. Also another layer for identity, their immigration status when they come here. So all of that intersects with each other, creating this complexity.

[P7] I think [our current approach to housing] also fails to recognize that just because you put somebody in a room with the four walls doesn't solve all their social issues, there's a lot of other things, that it's a multi or intersectional problem. And I think personally, it needs to be approached from an intersectional lens. So people can have good housing and you know, pay for rent to pay for food, education or childcare, whatever.

That said, despite the best efforts of their organization, one participant felt that there were still service gaps for LGBTQ refugees that remained unfulfilled. They identified the need for dedicated temporary 'rainbow housing' in Alberta – a place where LGBTQ refugees could go while they waited for more permanent housing:

[P6] So we are in struggle. We need to have this rainbow housing, let's say, for LGBTQ newcomers. This is something we are looking for, to have, you know, we are trying our best to get in direct contact to talk to people about that. To see like, how we can get the support.

Participants also identified the ways in which intersectionality was inadequately or improperly employed by select organizations, and by the federal government. One participant discussed the ways in which a meaningful application of intersectionality requires the kind of holistic approach demonstrated by the organizations discussed above, and not an additive approach. This additive approach involves looking at intersectionality as an equation—wherein the addition of various identities together produces an outcome—as opposed to examining the ways in which various structures of oppression interact to produce material inequalities. This means that some LGBTQ-serving organizations are unable to meet the needs of their clientele, because they do not adequately consider the ways in which identities and structures *intersect*:

[P5] Because I think [LGBTQ organization] has positioned itself I think, as this very, like, small 'L' liberal, gay focused organization. And I know over the past few years, they've tried different ways to be like, 'no, we care about trans people', or 'we care about race'. But candidly, it doesn't feel like it's coming from a genuine place. It feels like they were called out and they're trying to prove that they're accounting for those different things in a very, you know, second wave, liberal feminist way: 'oh, we forgot to talk about race. So we can add that, right, and think about it, right.'

Another participant leveled a similar critique at the Gender-Based Analysis + (GBA+) approach, an adaptation of intersectionality employed by the federal government, including in the *NHS*. According to this participant, GBA+ is an additive approach to intersectionality, one that is not attuned to structures of oppression, and therefore cannot account for the intersectional needs of various groups. Furthermore, they felt that the focus on priority populations in the *NHS* (including both LGBTQ2S people and newcomers) was a simplistic way of approaching intersectionality:

[P1] I'm not a huge fan of the GBA+ approach, I much prefer intersectionality, because it looks at power dynamics and some of the more structural and societal influences, and I think that is still largely missing from the conversation we are having about housing.

[P1] And that's one of my objections to GBA+, is it is still very much rooted in putting people into boxes of one category or another, whereas no one lives like that right? So people have multiple pieces of their lives, and they can be both oppressed in some respects and the oppressor in others, so using the power language.

[P1] [T]hat translates into making it difficult to evaluate and say that you are meeting your outcomes unless you put people into boxes, so it's a bit of a catch-22 and this is no different, so it's not like it's unique to the National Housing Strategy, I just don't think we're there yet and we don't really understand how to do it without slotting people into boxes quite as much as we do now.

Overall, the feeling among these two participants was that intersectionality is effective when employed well, but also that this theory is frequently misapplied.

#### *4.2.2.7 Navigating Unfamiliar Systems*

Participants working in the housing system described the difficulty some LGBTQ refugees experience in navigating the Canadian housing system, which is rarely sufficiently explained to them. It can be very overwhelming to navigate a housing system with which one has little to no familiarity, and newcomers can sometimes inadvertently put their housing at risk:

[P1] [I]f you're dealing with refugees who are already dealing with trauma, who may come from places where the forms of housing are very different, maintaining housing especially in some of the cities in [Alberta] require you to adapt quite a lot in terms of the how you [manage] humidity in your home, how you cook, using the shower curtain, understanding not to plug toilets.

[P1] And you put your housing at risk inadvertently just by not realizing how like the Eurocentric sort of structure of housing is to operate. And so that is one of the things that we saw more so than anything else, is the maintaining of the housing because people didn't fully appreciate what they had to do, or if there's language barriers. Dealing with pests and pest maintenance was often the reason people got evicted, because they just didn't fully appreciate the need to either cooperate

or the fact that they needed to report it. And that they wouldn't be in trouble for reporting it, was also a huge challenge.

[Interviewer] So like, a lot of the time, they just assume that if there's like issues in the unit, that they'll get in trouble for the issues, when in reality, they're getting in trouble for not reporting the issues...

[P8] Even things like, you know, needing a shower curtain for your shower, because there's no drain in the middle of the floor, right?

#### *4.2.2.8 Structural Change*

The need for structural change in the housing system was also highlighted throughout the interviews. One participant expressed their frustration with the way housing problems are framed in Canada, as many people believe that the solutions can be found within the existing housing system. As such, the housing system itself is never questioned:

[P8] [The NHS] maintains our housing system, right? So, the kinds of opportunities or interventions that they list in order to address, you know, like rising costs or housing need, are all within our housing system. For example, never once is rent control mentioned. Like discrimination is mentioned, but colonialism is not, you know? ... Like there's no question around, should our housing market be financialized?

[P8] Throughout all of [the NHS] documents is a recognition that women need housing more, but there's nothing like why. So it's 'let's create more housing for women', instead of saying, 'why are women excluded from housing?' This is the thing that annoys me about policy all the time. ... I feel really mad [about] the CMHC definition of the social inclusion index, because it's like, 'How can people be more included? Can we get people invested? Or like, included in the

economy? How can we get people with disabilities jobs?’ instead of saying, like, ‘Wow, it’s really fucked that so many people are outside of this, maybe we should build a new system.’ So it’s like this kind of incremental change, of, you know, trying to include people in a system instead of saying like, ‘**maybe this whole system is wrong.**’ (emphasis added)

This participant also discussed how individuals working within the housing system burn out, as they enter it hoping to make a difference through structural change but are ultimately unable to make that happen. In this sense, the housing system and the way it operates can impact both clients and workers in a negative way:

[P8] And I think we kind of see that in a lot of housing workers who come in, like, critical of the system and critical of housing and inequity and like the financialization of housing. So they get into the sphere, because they are passionate about people deserving housing. And then there’s no room for that passion, right. There’s no structural, or systemic work for people. And I think that’s a real challenge, too.

Another participant described how legal and rights-based issues are frequently prioritized by governments and LGBTQ-serving organizations. However, more complex issues—such as queer and trans homelessness—get pushed to the wayside, as these are battles without ‘easy’ victories. This participant felt that a straightforward rights-based approach to an issue like homelessness and housing precarity may still fall short of achieving our housing goals:

[P5] And there certainly is an importance, I think, to pursuing some of those legal battles. I just am very weary and constantly skeptical of when we focus too much on attaining rights or attaining changes in those ways, because they’re always so narrow. The ways in which they can be applied are so specific, and so

exclusionary and constraining. It's thinking through things like ... what are the big topics that the federal government is talking about right now, in terms of gay rights—it's blood bans and conversion therapy? Sure, those are important things, they are, but there's so much incredible deep work happening in queer and trans communities. And these are the two issues that float to the surface because they're policy issues that are relatively easy to check a box and say you did it right. How do you deal with like queer and trans homelessness? That is an incredibly thorny, complicated situation with multiple jurisdictions of government.

By highlighting factors such as discrimination, systemic issues in the housing system, and the barriers that exist within the housing system, participants were able to point to the complicated and multi-faceted barriers an LGBTQ refugee may experience while trying to navigate housing in Alberta. They noted that these barriers are structural in nature, and can therefore not be attributed to, nor blamed on, individual refugees. Finally, participants noted the ways in which these systemic issues could be challenged, pointing to intersectionality as a valuable tool to understand and tackle them.

#### 4.2.3 Bureaucracy

##### *4.2.3.1 Administrative barriers*

Administrative barriers pose significant hurdles to accessing housing for LGBTQ refugees specifically, but also for anyone trying to access social housing. Administrative barriers to housing were such a prominent issue that they were mentioned by every interview participant at least once. These barriers posed significant hurdles to both getting into the country and getting into housing, and caused LGBTQ refugees (and many other individuals) undue distress.

Interview participants described the social housing system as being comprised of many different administrative barriers. These included significant waitlists, where—depending



on exact circumstances—applicants can wait for years before they become eligible for housing. In addition, applicants can wait for months to even access a housing worker:

[P2] Yeah, there's some programs ... where they help you pay the damage deposit [for a unit] and the first few months rent and things, so along those lines we are making some headway too. But the waitlist to get a housing worker is ... a year, two years?

[P3] It's just it's really hard to get into non-market housing. I mean, they're gonna have to wait three to four years. So, I mean, really, what's the point? That's what I'm thinking sometimes.

[P3] [Housing program] receives a lot of inquiries through email and our main line, but given the way things are run, it may take a couple weeks for people who are trying to connect with us to hear back. Phone numbers may change during that time period—which is often the case. Or we may have missed a window of opportunity to connect with a person who has now gone AWOL—people may be in the mental space [to] access services at one point but then later may change their mind about it.

One participant added that the system might not be able to respond adequately if an applicant's housing needs were to change while they waited for housing:

[P1] The length of time people wait is so long that things really can change. So if you have someone who suddenly finds themselves in a much more tenuous position the question then becomes can the system actually adequately respond to those who are most in need?

A couple of participants also discussed limitations with regards to how the housing system is operated, due to either the incomprehensibility of the system to those applying for housing, or the fact that the system is severely understaffed:

[P3] I think **the system is a barrier in itself**, because it can take so long to even get your application in, because a lot of people aren't aware how to do that. So they just spent years maybe without taking on any help, because seeking help to them just seems fruitless? A lot of people who are like, 'Yeah, I've been homeless for 10 years now' ... **So yeah, I think that's the system, it wears a lot of people down—like social services in general. So they just don't see the worth in asking for help** (emphasis added).

[P2] [T]hey've made the process super complicated and you call, you're on hold forever, and then you get a worker that's had a bad day. And you know—it's super frustrating. We quite often have one of the staff do the call for the client. It's just the whole system really needs to be overhauled. You know, it's so understaffed.

Finally, one participant discussed the difficulties caused by having waitlists for programs, such as rent supplements, as it made it hard for clients to know if they would have the kind of financial support they require before signing their lease:

[P3] There is a waiting list for the rent supplement program at [housing organization], which is why it is an even more flawed system. Participants sometimes have to sign a lease agreement without even knowing if they'll be able to get the supplement to maintain their housing.

Another administrative barrier related to social housing (and similar programs) is the complexity of the application process. It requires a great deal of 'form literacy' -- that is, the ability to read and understand application forms. This can be extremely difficult, especially if a client does not speak English as their first language, or has not applied for social housing or a similar program previously:

[P2] They get overwhelmed right? It's hard, when you go, and you have to fill out this application that's, you know, 20 pages. Most can't get past two pages, right? They give up, right? It can be really intimidating for them.

[P7] Especially if English isn't your first language, I think is much more difficult. You know, the way structures are set up is difficult. Like, if you had to apply for student loans, even that's confusing. And, you know, when I had to apply for student loans, I was educated to high school—came from a decent amount of privilege--and it was confusing for me. So accessing some of the supports, especially the government supports like AISH, EI, I'd say it's not easy.

[P8] Administration is one [barrier]. And by that, I mean the onerous process, the need for form literacy. The length of waitlist means that people have to update their information constantly and don't, so we like lose contact information of people. So the administrative burden that's put it on people who are applying for housing is incredibly onerous. It requires a kind of literacy that many people do not have.

The strict eligibility criteria for social housing in Alberta were also identified as a significant administrative barrier. The eligibility criteria mean that tenants can be forced to choose between earning more income or ensuring that they have stable housing. Earning too much income in a given year could result in an immediate notice to vacate, creating a disincentive for individuals in social housing to achieve economic security:

[P1] One of the biggest barriers—although it's hard to prove this, people are reluctant to tell you, so we only ever hear about it anecdotally—is the continued eligibility requirement, which in some places in Alberta was very strictly enforced. So as soon as you went over the limit you were out. And so people would have to make choices between housing security and increasing economic security, which seems contradictory to the overall policy objective

Another participant raised the issue of residency requirements as a potential barrier to securing housing, although not all housing providers have such a requirement. A residency requirement means that a client must live in the place in which they are applying for housing, which prevents them from moving to the first location in which social housing units become available:

[P8] So there are four rules for eligibility that exist under the legislation, and one of those is optional for housing management to have and it's residency. So some housing management bodies have residency requirements, so you have to live in the city you're applying in. I think the intention is so that you would not just be applying in every city. But the consequence means that, for example, Indigenous folks who are trying to come off reserve cannot apply for housing without an address in the city, right? So that, to me, is like neutral but not neutral, because it has differential impacts.

#### *4.1.3.2 Disclosure*

Another theme that was identified over the course of the interviews was that of disclosure of SOGIE identity and related life experiences in order to secure housing. Two participants who have worked in the housing system noted that, as professionals, they do not feel it appropriate to ask clients for more information than required to determine eligibility. Participants acknowledged that more demographic information

could have been helpful—for researchers or to help providers better understand the clientele they are serving—but that the potential negatives of gathering such information outweigh the potential benefits:

[P1] [We are] very cognizant that there is only so much personal information...y'know, we're already asking invasive and personal questions for people to have to tell us most of their story, so without an existing relationship, to ask them to disclose even more... just because we like data collection, is I think a real challenge.

[P8] We are mandated through legislation not to [ask for demographic information that] was not for the purposes of like assessing housing need—priority or need. But also, people shouldn't have to disclose every single thing to us, because we want to know, just in case someone asks us. We can't do that. But then it presents problems like, wouldn't it be helpful if we knew if there was an over representation of Indigenous people in social and affordable housing?

Participants felt that asking clients to disclose more information to housing providers could potentially be upsetting or re-stigmatizing for clients who have already faced significant discrimination in housing, or other traumatic experiences. They recognized that—as housing providers—they are in a position of power relative to their clients, and that this position is not to be taken lightly:

[P1] One of the things that we often fail to recognize is the power dynamics. So there's all this discussion of well ... researchers really get frustrated because they want us to be collecting more information—sometimes governments do too because they're being asked to report on that information—without recognizing that there is a power dynamic there. So [as a client] that's not only opening yourself up to discrimination which you've likely experienced in other parts of the

housing system, very possibly, but you're opening yourself up and becoming very vulnerable to someone who has control over your housing. So particularly if you've had a bad experience in that regard, you're going to be very concerned about doing it again.

[P8] I would say that the prioritization of people is problematic, and is done terribly unevenly across the province. And, you know, [redacted] used to describe it as like, the most fair way to be unfair to everyone, because it makes a matrix of people's lived experiences. And it demands a kind of disclosure that I think ... has potential to be re-stigmatizing for people. So, as you're saying, if people are refugees [and] it's because of queer identity, and then they have to come here and disclose that again, but they're coming from a place where disclosing that would have meant their death or, you know, expulsion from community.

#### *4.2.3.3 Priority in social housing*

In Alberta's social housing system, the concept of priority, as determined by the point-score system, is central to operations. Admission into subsidized housing prioritizes those in a state of 'housing emergency' – individuals who are determined to be in dire need. The more acute an applicant's emergency, the more points they receive on their application, the more their needs are prioritized, and the quicker they move into social housing. This system was explained as follows:

[P7] The Social Housing Accommodation Regulation—we call it SHAR—is a regulation under the Alberta Housing Act. And it's for those deeply subsidized or community housing units. How the point score works is, when you're filling out an application, every applicant gets certain points, depending on different criteria. So I think if you're facing an eviction, you are fleeing domestic violence and some other emergency type situations, you get 15 points. And then you get points based on how many dependents you have, points based on how far your housing

is from where you work. You get points on the suitability of your current unit, like if there's any health implications. You get a series of points for different things. So it's not actually a first-come first-served waitlist, it's what we call a priority waitlist.

There are advantages and disadvantages to such a system. The advantage is that individuals who are in dire need of housing will be housed relatively quickly, as opposed to waiting on a 'first-come first-served' waitlist. In this sense, the system is well-equipped to respond to someone determined to be in urgent need:

[P1] The advantage of having the point score system is that it is really adaptable to circumstances for households on an immediate basis. It's not based on when you apply per se, but on how many points you get based on your circumstances. So, if your circumstances change, you either go up or down in the priority list. The only time the date of your application comes into question is if you have the exact same number of points as another household, then it goes by who applied first. ... Where that's advantageous is you could have someone who's new to the municipality or even to the country and who can get priority right away based on their circumstances, compared to someone who may have already been on the list for like ten years, but who may not be in as dire circumstances. So it really responds to a level of urgency.

[P7] Basically how [the point-score system] works, is it's like triage. ... But the way I view it is it's the best of the worst kind of way to do something. So I think the benefit of it is, it does prioritize people who are in dire need. It puts emergencies first.

[P7] If you're in a severe emergency, it'll be weeks [until you're housed].

These participants noted that what makes the point-score system good at responding to emergencies was also what made it poor at responding to individuals who were not determined to be in 'dire need' of housing, but who were nonetheless contending with a level of housing precarity:

[P1] Now the unfairness part is that everyone on that list has some level of urgency when it comes to a lack of affordability or a lack of quality housing.

[P7] The downside is it doesn't really provide assistance to a lot of people who will be on the waitlist forever—who have a low-paying job, have no kids, you know, the kind of people who are living paycheque to paycheque. They have enough money to get by, but it's not comfortable living. So those people are going to be on the waitlist forever. So yeah, the benefit is people who are in [an] emergency can get housing much more quickly. But it doesn't account for, you know, like thinking of housing as a human right, it doesn't really address that.

Another factor determining how quickly applicants will be moved into housing is what units are available at any given time. The size of units can be constraining at times, with larger units being less common, which reduces access for households with children of different genders, who are not allowed to share a room:

[P7] So like, yeah, we've had families fleeing domestic violence with children, and it's a matter of weeks before they can get housing. But again, it depends on the availability of housing. If you're a single mom, and you have like, six kids, we don't have we don't have a lot of units that big. And we're also bound by the provincial regulations for accommodation, so we couldn't put a brother—it's very outdated—and a sister who are over, I think over five [years old], they can't share a bedroom.



Once again, through discussions of systemic issues, including administrative barriers within the housing system, issues surrounding disclosure, and the strengths and limitations of the point-score system, participants were able to highlight the various hurdles an LGBTQ refugee may have to overcome to secure appropriate housing. These bureaucratic challenges, combined with the other structural issues described in the following theme, function together to render housing inaccessible to many individuals, including LGBTQ refugees. The solutions to these barriers are neither simple nor straightforward, but nonetheless need to be addressed to ensure housing is available to all who require it.

#### 4.2.4 Housing-related Barriers

##### *4.2.4.1 Affordability*

Affordability was identified as a significant barrier to housing by seven of the eight participants. They offered varied perspectives on the issue, discussing how their organization worked to render housing affordable, how income support functions in Alberta, and how mixed-income housing affects affordability. While their insights into housing affordability differed, all participants agreed that housing is generally not affordable to people on low and modest incomes in Alberta.

One participant working in the refugee-serving sector described how their organization renders housing affordable for their clients. In this instance, affordability is achieved through a partnership with a corporate landlord, which reduces rents for select units so they can be covered entirely by a tenant's shelter allowance, offered through Alberta Income Support (encompassing Alberta Works and the Resettlement Assistance Program):

[P6] So we have [an] agreement with [private landlord] for our clients, so they get a discount on [what] they're renting monthly. And they send us a list of availability for the apartments they have.

[P6] They have this offer, you know, and it's—I think—two years ago, we had this partnership or agreement and...actually it's great that [it] solves lots of this [problem] where our [clients] can't afford [housing].

Many participants noted that, even after individuals receive Income Support, such support often falls short of rendering housing truly affordable. This can be because the shelter allowance included in such support does not cover the cost of rent, or additional housing-related expenses, such as utilities or a damage deposit:

[P2] Income—you know, most of our folks are on income support and [have] no [other] income. And so that's another barrier to get a damage deposit and then to pay utilities. Alberta Works only gives you under \$800. So you gotta pay your rent, your cable, and whatever else, groceries and stuff, it doesn't last very long.

[P1] So for certain populations that are relying on some form of government assistance to supplement income, or as their main source of income, certainly that's another piece of it. The income supplementation is inadequate, and sometimes it will still remain inadequate even with a rent subsidy. It sometimes goes far enough to make some housing affordable, but really at the end of the day whether its bricks and mortar [subsidized] housing or rent subsidy, there's just not enough of it.

[P8] And that question is that their shelter allowance is way too little. So most of those welfare or social security system [payments] include shelter benefits, and they are tiny, they're teeny tiny. You can barely get housing in an affordable market on a shelter [allowance]. And so systemically, what this means is that affordable housing providers shoulder that burden, so they cover the costs.

A couple of participants also pointed to increasing rents and stagnant or declining wages as causes of housing unaffordability. Increasing rents, without matching increases in wages, can function as a one-two punch when it comes to housing affordability:

[P7] People just don't have enough income, which is why they're looking for social and affordable housing in the first place. And the more your income goes down, the harder it is to access housing, because there's not enough of the deeply subsidized housing in existence.

[P1] So if you think about some of the news stories that are coming out of the East Coast where buildings are being bought up by new investors and all of a sudden you're getting rent increases of a couple hundred dollars a month, which may not seem like a lot but it literally can be the difference between someone being able to access housing or not. Even if they're already in the housing, so continued access.

Another issue within the social housing system is the move to a mixed-income housing model, wherein some units are rented at market rate, and these units function to subsidize the rent for other units. However, what this model means in practice is that social housing providers cannot subsidize units at the same level as they were able to previously, meaning they will lose some deep subsidy units:

[P7] What we [housing provider] have been doing is trying to come up with new ways to be able to provide housing without [government-funded operating] agreements. So mixed income developments is something that we [identified] - we have two mixed income developments, and we're building two more ... depending on city council and stuff like that. So mixed income development and

creating housing that that operates outside of provincial regulation. Like we're still gonna follow the Housing Act, but outside of that social housing accommodation regulation, which is for the deeply subsidized [units], because then we don't have to ask for certain things. But it also means we can't subsidize the housing as heavily because as a nonprofit, we're not allowed to hold on to a revenue. So the idea behind mixed income is that it becomes a self-sustaining development where there's some units rented at market rate, [which] subsidize the lower rent, right? But still, it's not sustainable for rental units at the deeply subsidized end, you know? I think the lowest we have is rented is at 60% of market value. So yeah, unfortunately, not deeply subsidized, which is what most of our applications [are for].

[P8] In the Canadian context, many housing providers are moving to a mixed income model ...what it means is that we, in most cases, are losing like deep subsidy units, which is where people who are receiving benefits ended up sort of living. I think they require a deep subsidy because their shelter allowance is so low. So as we're losing those deeply subsidized units across the country, that means the visibility for them is less... But it's certainly happening in like some of the more grotesque versions of mixed income. Where, you know, people have separate entrances and all of that kind of stuff. But even I think, with the best intention, what's ending up happening is, we're seeing a loss of some sort. I mean, it's because housing providers need to recoup more costs. So while they [people in need of deep subsidy units] may be prioritized in the same way, in the Alberta system, there's going to be less units for them, right?

Multiple participants pointed to the ways in which their organizations attempted to aid individuals who are struggling to afford housing. One way this was achieved was through prioritization in social housing, wherein individuals paying more than 30% of their income in rent were moved up the priority list:

[P7] In terms of points, the source of income in terms of points, it doesn't matter, just total income matters. So if you're—if your [income] is \$1,000 and you're paying \$900 in rent, you will get lots of points because you're paying more than 30% of your income towards rent.

Other participants pointed to areas where their organizations provide supplementary support where government support is lacking. This frequently took the form of increased funding, acknowledging that Alberta Income Support is inadequate:

[P4] So basically, once they approach us, you know, we can provide settlement, employment support, whatever they need. To be eligible to work legally in Canada, first they have to submit [their] refugee claim. So for example, somebody will approach us who just like recently moved to Canada, and they'd [need] like \$500. And to submit your application, you need at least a month, or even more. So how will you pay, with no connections? And we did [give them] a small amount of money, because how you will survive?

[P3] So basically, the [housing organizations] provide that [support]. ... They basically get funding so that if an individual that they're working with needs funding for like a damage deposit or first month's rent, they can provide it. You just need your proof of income and ... the lease agreement, you just need both documents.

#### *4.2.4.2 Availability*

In addition to affordability, participants identified the availability of social and affordable housing as a barrier to achieving adequate housing. This lack of availability presents itself as a barrier in two primary ways: first, there is simply not enough supply to meet the demand for social and affordable housing; and second, some of the housing that is

available is inappropriate (because it is rundown or unable to fulfill individuals' housing needs).

Participants repeatedly pointed to a shortage of social and affordable units as compromising to housing access. In particular, demand for social housing—including and especially permanent supportive housing—far outweighs supply, leading to significant wait times in the sector, as discussed in section 4.2.2:

[P1] Literally the demand far outstrips the supply, and the supply that is available isn't necessarily suitable for all of the households who are in dire need. ...What it comes down to, the most basic piece of it, is the fact that we just don't have enough.

[P7] I mean, I think the number one issue [of] the two problems is our housing availability. We just don't have enough housing. And income, people don't have enough income.

[P3] They fill out that application, they send it in, and then they're accepted, and we prioritize them. That process is fairly quick. But the wait to actually get into supportive housing is so so long. There's no vacancies because when someone gets into supportive housing, they basically stay there until like they willfully want to move away or until the person passes on. So we don't really get that many vacancies. So that's the main issue. I think they are making new sites.

Participants also pointed to the fact that, even when housing is available, it is often inappropriate. For example, housing that is affordable within the private rental market can be poorly maintained, forcing low-income people into inadequate units. At other

times, the units that are available are not large enough to meet the housing needs of many tenants:

[P2] And that's the problem too, the only affordable buildings are usually really rundown. Pretty bad landlords, stuff like that. And it's that or being homeless, so a lot of folks just choose to live in really bad apartments.

[P8] It's the [housing stock] we have is inappropriate. Okay, so one if the things that's been really interesting to me...is that many of the rural providers in Alberta don't have long wait lists, but they do have a wait list, because they don't have appropriate housing. So they won't have usually it's big enough units for like large intergenerational families. Our [housing stock] is, you know, from the 60s and 70s, and very much built for the white nuclear family...So the [housing stock] is like, not enough and not sufficient for the folks who need it.

#### *4.2.4.3 Adequacy*

Participants also pointed to the inadequacy of housing in Alberta, beyond issues of supply, affordability and appropriateness. They discussed the limitations surrounding where housing is located, its accessibility for people with disabilities, and the way it is designed. These factors contribute to a situation in which much of the housing available in Alberta is fundamentally unable to meet the needs of many tenants. Tense relationships between various levels of government and housing providers could also have a negative impact on the adequacy of housing in Alberta, as it was difficult for providers to predict the kinds of government support and funding they would receive from year-to-year.

#### *Accessibility*

One participant pointed to the ways in which housing can remain inaccessible to people with disabilities, even in buildings that contain 'accessible units.' Specifically, just because a unit technically meets accessibility requirements, does not render it accessible to all people with disabilities:

[P1] Even if it is an accessible unit, building code is very different than necessarily how people live with accommodation.

This participant also pointed to the fact that purpose-built rentals are not necessarily built with their tenants in mind. As a result, they are often not located near transit or trails, making it more difficult for tenants to access the workplaces and other amenities. Where housing is located can also impact its accessibility:

[P1] Again, suitability and quality, so y'know the purpose-built rental housing tends to be on the fringes of communities. Like developers will put it in to a new community, but it tends to be sort of like on the outside to be noise protectors almost, for the single family detached homes, and in a lot of neighbourhoods they may not have great transit or walking areas or biking areas. So it's just not necessarily as thought out because the priority is on the single detached home ownership model as opposed to purpose built rentals.

## Poor Design

Moreover, units are not always built in a way that is conducive to how people live, and open concept units can fall short of meeting the needs of tenants who require a higher degree of privacy. The standardized way in which housing is frequently built can come into conflict with the diverse lives that tenants lead:



[P8] And many of them said, we don't want open spaces, because, you know, we need to be able to go in the kitchen and close the door, so we can take off our hijabs, but we can't take them off if it's an open space. And like, we want to be in the kitchen, as women together as a collective. But we can't really do that in the same way. And it really has stuck with me as an example of all of the ways in which we don't understand how inappropriate the housing we have can be for people. And so just even thinking about like, imagine, you know, you just can't even take your hijab off.

## Relationships with Governments

Conflict between the Alberta provincial government and the federal government can sometimes make coordination between these two governments and housing providers difficult. This is exacerbated by the fact that the federal government effectively removed themselves from the provision of housing in the 1990s, leaving provincial and municipal governments, as well as housing providers, to manage housing on their own. This relationship to and between governments can affect housing availability, as it is difficult for housing providers to predict the kinds of government support and funding they will receive:

[P1] [J]ust having a National Housing Strategy is a good first step. Canada has never had one before. It provides us at least with some direction with some of the priorities from the federal government's perspective, but it also sorta represents a tension between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments, because for all intents and purposes the federal government got out of that space in the 90s.

[P7] I think the way community housing has been shaped since the 90s—it's very separate from federal initiatives, because it's all mandated at the provincial level.

Because of that, Alberta does not have the strongest relationship with the federal government. Yeah, it's hard to get cooperation between the two. I find that that has been a bit of a block for [getting] some of the stuff from the National Housing Strategy carried out.

One participant also highlighted that communication between social housing providers and the provincial government is not great, leaving the former to operate with a lot of uncertainty. Specifically, providers perceive that the provincial government cannot be relied upon for funding, making planning for the future very difficult:

[P7] We've had operating agreements [with the provincial government], and most of them are expiring in the next three to five years. And we don't know what's happening with those when they end and, you know, the operation of [those units]: paying for utilities, paying for suite turnovers when somebody moves out. So, you know, are these units going to be closed? Are they going to be transferred to the private market? Are they going to be transferred to the city? We don't know. So it makes planning I think very difficult and allocating budget difficult.

As explained in this section, there are myriad factors that influence the quality and availability of housing in Alberta. These include issues such as affordability, the quality of Alberta's housing stock and its ability to meet demand, the accessibility of housing, and finally, the relationship between governments, as well as between governments and providers. All of these barriers influence and build on one another, affecting housing accessibility for LGBTQ refugees, as well as other low- to middle-income Albertans who are trying to navigate a tense and challenging housing system.

#### 4.2.5 Experiences in Housing

Many different factors can influence a tenant's housing experiences. These factors can exist 'outside' of housing, such as the services and support provided by various organizations to meet the needs of their clients, or they can be deeply embedded in the housing system, such as the ideology of the housing continuum. Regardless of whether these factors are 'inside' or 'outside' the housing system, they significantly affect how LGBTQ refugees navigate the housing system in Alberta.

##### *4.2.5.1 Additional services*

Participants identified a lack of support for many tenants as an issue in the sector, and described the ways in which their organizations attempted to 'bridge the gap' and provide services that were otherwise missing in the lives of their clients. They recognized that housing is not the only service that individuals require, and that mental health supports, emergency grants and transit passes (to name a few) may also be necessary for their clients to live full lives.

Two participants working within the refugee-serving sector described the ways that their organizations attempt to fulfill the needs of their clients that are not being met through other programs, including Income Support and the GAR program. Oftentimes, these organizations were able to compensate and provide services such as transit passes and food through donations:

[P6] So probably there's three weeks to one month at the beginning where [refugee applicants] kind of struggle, and this is issue for us at [refugee-serving organization]. We have an emergency fund that can support them with food. While at this time, we don't have the ability to support them financially, for the food and clothes we can support that. We have a Donation Centre. So we can supply them with bus tickets, clothes, this/that, you know, right? Yeah, and that's

temporary just [until] they get income support and then they will be able to find house to pay for [somewhere] to live.

[P4] We also develop something along with financial support, what we call a wraparound approach. You know, like, if you are a refugee claimant, and you don't have money to pay your rent [or] many other things. We always want to know more about clients, to see how we can help. For example, if they need food, and like people who belong to certain cultures.... We have a really great food bank here in Calgary, but sometimes what they get there doesn't fit into their needs, you know? We've developed, for example, our own program of culturally appropriate food hampers...we create these hampers to meet the needs.

[P4] [Describing their agency's income support program] What we also learned during this project is that it's super important to give them support not only for like, one month. We can provide more—usually, we did cycles of three months. So, for example, if you are approved for [our program] you will get money for three months. And, in fact, during that three months, you're safe, right? And then ... maybe to do like a job search and try to apply for and get a job or something like that.

The importance of culturally competent mental health care was also emphasized, as refugees may not feel comfortable accessing Western mental health services that are not attentive to their needs. As touched on earlier by many participants, many refugees have traumatic experiences in their past, and being able to provide sufficient mental health care is pivotal to ensuring their success in Canada:

[P4] [S]o we also provide now like mental health support to newcomers which is also an important part because what we learn again it's like mainstream mental health services don't work always for new immigrants. Because of cultural

differences and sometimes these kind of supports are totally different you know. Many cultures they have a totally different approach to mental health.

Other participants working in the housing and LGBTQ-serving sectors described their organizations providing ongoing support for their clients even after they are housed. These participants wanted to ensure that their clients succeeded in their new homes, so they provided ongoing aid:

[P3] And then once you do get housed, they typically provide follow-up support for up to a year with rent, food, clothing, furniture, all that sort of stuff.

[P2] So we'll support them from start to finish, and then when they're housed, we also support them. And we'll go in and help them clean, see if they got groceries, stuff like that.

#### *4.2.5.2 Housing Continuum*

Throughout the interviews, a couple of participants working within the housing system voiced criticism of the concept of a housing continuum. The housing continuum refers to the belief held by many that an individual will move through different stages of housing in their lifetime and that 'moving up' the housing continuum is representative of one's success within the housing system. In the visual illustration of the housing continuum from CMHC presented in Figure 4, this involves moving from left to right:



*Figure 4: The Housing Continuum (Source: CMHC 2019)*

Figure 4 suggests that the pinnacle of success within this model is the achievement of market home ownership. One participant was critical of this treatment of home ownership, as well as the way that the NHS prioritizes home ownership and homeowners over individuals experiencing more dire housing need:

[P1] So we're talking about the [National Housing] Strategy document itself as aspirational, ...it prioritizes in this case the people who are in most urgent housing need, but then subsequent and more recent announcements also seem to be returning back to [supporting] those in home ownership or who want to be in home ownership situations.

The housing continuum affects tenancy in social housing. Specifically, the belief that individuals should 'move up' the housing continuum means that social housing is understood as serving only those in 'most need.' As such, social housing is treated as a temporary fix, and the priority system works to move individuals through social housing as quickly as possible:

[P1] So if you are of the opinion that it should help those in the most need, and those are defined by people who are under this [income] threshold...because it's a limited good, basically, you need to then prioritize those who are under the limit, right? If you are someone who subscribes to the idea that social housing is

a temporary thing, then you also believe that people should be able to move into other economic demographics and then move themselves out of social housing. ... Most of the argument centres around the fact that it's a limited good and they have a mandate to help those most in need and that's how they see executing it.

Another participant touched on the fact that the concept of the housing continuum assumes that people *want* to 'move up' and 'graduate' to other forms of housing, becoming increasingly independent as they do so. The pressure placed on individuals to enter into market housing (i.e., private rental tenure, and one day home ownership), compromises their ability to remain reliably housed at other stages on the continuum:

[P7] Part of my answer is that **our approach to housing is wrong**... You know, we have the housing continuum, and tend to [think] if you're at this spot, you must automatically want to move to the next spot. I think that really disregards the fact that people have different priorities, not everybody wants to be a homeowner, not everybody wants to buy a house as an investment (emphasis added).

[P7] So I think our approach to housing is flawed, because ... it's a very capitalistic approach. I think that it does a disservice to anyone who needs to live in [social housing] because it puts an added pressure on, [because] of how you view housing as a commodity instead of housing as a service.

Finally, this participant discussed how building 'stop gap' or temporary units forces people to move along the housing continuum, which can make it harder for some tenants to maintain their housing. This participant proposes building units where tenants do not feel pressured to move along the continuum and where they can stay for the long-term:

[P7] Why do we have to put someone in a stopgap unit that is like, a bachelor suite? Why don't we put them into, you know, a townhouse or apartment or whatever meets their needs, and then provide the supports? ...And so instead of graduating to a new building, when someone no longer needs, like a social worker or something, the social worker just stops coming to that house. And the person continues to live in that building. ...so instead of the continuum being different buildings, that continuum is up to the individual.

As highlighted by the participants quoted above, the ideology of a housing continuum can come into conflict with an individual's ability to maintain their housing. In order to ensure that individuals not only *become* housed, but *remain* housed, it is important to challenge the notion that one must always be advancing along the continuum in order to achieve housing success. Rather, the emphasis should be placed on ensuring individuals are able to maintain their housing long-term.

#### 4.2.5.3 *Maintaining housing*

Throughout the interviews, participants touched on the importance of ensuring clients are able to maintain their housing. This point was typically discussed in contrast to the emphasis placed on *securing* housing, particularly in the academic literature., which can lead to neglect of experiences once people are housed:

[P1] That's a huge gap in the National Housing Strategy—it's sort of assumed that once you're in, then you're good to go. There is not much attention paid to once you're in, what's your experience of being in? How long do people stay in?

[P1] A huge pet peeve of housing providers is that all of the supports, and all of the advocacy, are to help people get into housing. And then people are dropped. And in terms of the level of support [available] for [people] dealing with trauma, and [people] who may come from places where the forms of housing are very



different...maintaining housing, especially in some of the cities in [Alberta] require you to adapt quite a lot...

Several participants discussed the role that landlords have to play in ensuring individuals remain housed. Ultimately, tenants' ability to maintain their housing is dependent in part on the relationship they have with their landlord. The ability of the landlord to mediate tension between tenants, or their willingness to work through issues with tenants, can play a major role in those tenants' ability to maintain their housing long-term:

[P1] Maintaining your housing is largely driven by your relationship with your landlord, so if you have a bad relationship with the person who is your property manager, whether it's their biases or your biases, that could create some challenges. Where you live and who your neighbours are [are also relevant, because] sometimes we see ... tensions between communities, that spill over into their experience in living in the same complex. And ...then the whole complex got beholden to this issue, or like we had one tenant whose car was wrecked and who felt really harassed by a different group that was also in the same complex. The two groups had a longstanding history in other countries of not getting along. So, sometimes those more international challenges would be seen on a much more local scale, so that could interfere with their ability to maintain housing.

[P3] I've dealt with many landlords who are just, you know, not understanding or just refused to mediate any conflict or anything like that. They just automatically go to eviction. Yeah, it's, it's tough in those situations, because sometimes, I don't even have the full side of the story of like, what happened? Was the individual unable to maintain their housing sometimes due to like, loud noises or

like people they bring [in] or? Yeah, sometimes it's due to circumstances that I'm not aware of.

Finally, one participant touched on the belief held by some that housing is a solution all the problems an individual may face. They emphasized that individuals experience ongoing issues after they are housed, and may require ongoing support in order to maintain their housing:

[P8] I think it also comes with the embedded assumption that I've seen a lot, which is like, while we understand housing is like one of many things that people face, the assumption is housing kind of solves it. Because housing is connected to like all kinds of other like facets of wellbeing, or whatever you want to call it. And so there's a kind of assumption that people move in, and then they're fine. But we know that's not true, as housing providers. When I was at [housing provider], ... the stories that I would hear from [other staff], once people had moved into housing. Like, you know, they would like go to someone's apartment, and they have no furniture: 'I got them housing, but they don't have a bed, they don't have a couch, they have nothing.' And those aren't even folks who we would normally think of, or who would identify as needing permanent supportive housing. So not folks who would want support, but people who just like, don't have resources or access.

There are many factors that can influence a client's ability to maintain their housing. Some factors may be positive, such as additional help from organizations working outside the housing system, while others may be negative, such as the pressure placed on individuals to move along the housing continuum. Overall, it becomes clear through the interviews that housing is best conceived as a process, as individuals will require support at various points in their housing journey to maintain their housing.

#### 4.2.6 Conclusion

This subsection has presented the important insights offered by participants during key informant interviews. The participants who graciously participated in this research provided detailed accounts of what they have observed and learned during their time in the housing system, working with LGBTQ refugees and other queer people, and leading research projects of their own. They detailed the ways in which refugees experience the housing system, the barriers present to securing housing in Alberta, as well as the limited services available to LGBTQ refugees and other Albertans. Ultimately, participants were able to elaborate on points first identified during the policy analysis, as well as provide new and generative insights into the workings of Alberta's housing system. Indeed, participants were able to further elaborate on various policies identified during the policy analysis, such as income support policies, and therefore helped to fulfill the first research objective, and shed light on the legal and policy settings surrounding refugee status and housing in Canada. Further, through their insights about and commitments to intersectionality, participants were also able to fulfill the second research objective, which sought to examine the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees within the housing system. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, participants were able to point to various ways in which housing policy can and *needs* to change. The important contributions that interview participants made to this research cannot be overstated.

#### 4.3 Chapter conclusion

The policy analysis and key-informant interviews reported in this chapter spoke to each other quite substantially, with the latter confirming many of the findings from the former. For example, the policy analysis identified that many programs available to LGBTQ refugees, such as GAR and RAP, are insufficient to meet their settlement and housing needs. Key informants also emphasized this insufficiency; many discussed the rates available through Alberta Works (which are the same as RAP) as being far too low to afford housing, while participants working in the refugee-serving sector described the work they do to fill the gaps left by these programs. Further, issues related to housing

provision identified in the policy analysis, such as a move to a mixed-income model of housing, were also problematized the interviewees. This was true even though the policy analysis and interviews were conducted separately, as interview participants were not asked to comment on the findings of the policy analysis directly. Rather, they were asked to give their opinions on themes that I had identified as important during the initial policy analysis.

That said, and as mentioned previously, the interviews also provided brand new information that I had not come across during the policy analysis or in conducting my literature review. Participants brought my attention to issues such as priority in social housing and issues specific to refugee claimants. Perhaps most importantly, interview participants were able to provide insights how the housing system is *experienced* and *lived* by their clients. In other words, they were able to identify the kinds of intersecting systems their clients face while navigating Alberta's housing system; an analysis that was sorely missing from most of the documents I analyzed as part of my policy analysis. Through in-depth and nuanced accounts of their clients' experiences within Alberta's housing system, interview participants were able to get at the intersectional experiences of their clients in a way that policy was simply unable to do. For example, they described how the housing system and the welfare system intersected to produce barriers to access for their clients, and the ways in which systems of power and oppression such as homophobia, racism, and xenophobia compounded with housing and income support policies to exacerbate vulnerabilities within housing. Such insights were absent from the policies I examined, and thus from my policy analysis.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through policy analysis and key informant interviews, this thesis has addressed the question: *To what extent are LGBTQ refugees able to access safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada?* In answering this question, this thesis sought to: (1) develop a thorough understanding of the legal and policy settings surrounding refugee status and housing in Alberta and Canada; (2) examine the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees within the Albertan housing system using an intersectional framework; and (3) develop policy recommendations that account for and remedy the barriers experienced by LGBTQ refugees in the Canadian housing system. This chapter provides a concise summary of research findings in relation to the first and second objectives, and presents eight policy recommendations to address the third objective.

### 5.1 Objective 1: To develop a thorough understanding of the legal and policy settings surrounding refugee status and housing in Canada and Alberta.

To develop a robust understanding of the legal and policy context surrounding LGBTQ refugees in Canada and Alberta, I examined housing policy (at the municipal, provincial and federal levels), as well as income support policy and anti-discrimination law. Additionally, I examined federal immigration policy, as well as relevant international law surrounding the right to housing and LGBTQ rights. Taken together, these various laws and policies provide a comprehensive picture of the policy landscape LGBTQ refugees navigate in trying to access housing in Canada.

#### 5.1.1 Municipal policy

Chapter 4.1 examined municipal housing policy in the major cities of Edmonton and Calgary, as well as the smaller cities of Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie and the Wood Buffalo region (encompassing Fort McMurray). It found that municipalities in Alberta were primarily concerned with affordability, although the ways

in which they engaged with this issue varied. Specifically, Edmonton and Calgary were focused on rendering housing more affordable within the existing market-led housing system, as demonstrated in their affordable housing strategies. This involved expanding the affordable housing stock through the development of new units. For example, the City of Edmonton specifically planned to develop 2,500 new units of affordable housing to ensure “all residents can afford a place to live” (City of Edmonton, 2018, p. 1). However, other municipalities such as Medicine Hat and Grande Prairie took a different approach, with Medicine Hat focusing primarily on ending homelessness, and Grande Prairie focusing on the ways in which the market itself produces housing vulnerability. Indeed, the City of Grande Prairie describes their market as cyclical and unstable due to their dependence on the oil and gas sector. It is also important to note that all municipalities identified groups experiencing housing vulnerability, an issue that will be discussed later in light of Objective 2.

### 5.1.2 Provincial policy

Provincial housing policy is also centrally concerned with the issue of affordability. To render housing more affordable in Alberta, the province has planned to expand the affordable housing stock (Government of Alberta, 2017; SHS Consulting, 2020), increased the asset limit for affordable housing eligibility from \$7,000 to \$25,000, and moved to a mixed-income housing model (Government of Alberta, 2017). Currently, the Government of Alberta is seeking to transition from being an owner and operator of housing stock to a regulator and funder (Government of Alberta, 2021). Although groups experiencing housing vulnerability (including LGBTQ people and refugees) are identified in provincial policy (as they were at the municipal level), the specific affordability challenges that these groups experience, as well as the targeted solutions these challenges may warrant, were left unaddressed. Thus, while the issue of affordability was engaged in a general sense, root causes for affordability issues were not thoroughly unpacked. Indeed, various policy documents acknowledge that many groups struggle with housing affordability, but the ways in which the housing market produces housing unaffordability is never discussed. Further, policies that could curtail these

issues with affordability (such as rent control, or higher shelter allowances, for example) are never mentioned. Rather, affordability issues experienced by marginalized groups continue to exist at the level of the individual and are not properly attributed to factors like private development and housing commodification.

Provincial income support policies are also very relevant to questions of housing affordability, including for LGBTQ refugees. This research confirmed that welfare incomes in Alberta—whether they were associated with Alberta Works, RAP or AISH—fell short of rendering housing truly affordable. Indeed, as of 2016, welfare incomes in Alberta represented only 37.7% of the after-tax poverty line (Tweedle et al., 2017). As such, LGBTQ refugees accessing income support in Alberta are in no way guaranteed access to safe, stable and affordable housing.

Finally, this research also examined provincial anti-discrimination law in the form of the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. This legislation should help marginalized groups such as LGBTQ refugees secure housing as it prohibits discrimination on the basis of “race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, or sexual orientation” (Preamble). However, given that discrimination is very hard to prove, as it requires evidence of discriminatory intent (Spade, 2015), this *Act* alone does not guarantee, as a matter of practice, that LGBTQ refugees will not be discriminated against in housing in Alberta.

### 5.1.3 Federal policy

Both housing and immigration policies at the federal level affect the lives and housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees. The primary housing policy documents operating at the federal level are the *National Housing Strategy* and the *National Housing Strategy Act*. The key principles of the *NHS* are that: housing in Canada ought to be safe, affordable and accessible to all people; housing should prioritize vulnerable populations (including the 12 vulnerable groups it identifies); housing policy should be non-discriminatory; and that policy makers should be accountable to the public and encourage participation in policymaking (Government of Canada, 2017). The *NHS Act* develops this idea further,

stating that the *NHS* supports “the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (Preamble). It is important to note, however, that the progressive realization of the right to housing does not require states to directly and immediately engage in the construction and operation of new housing units, and therefore does not guarantee immediate relief with issues of housing vulnerability. Further, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (2019) is skeptical of the *NHS*’ ability to accomplish these goals, as it largely maintains previous levels of funding. Indeed, “[i]t is not clear that the National Housing Strategy will reduce the prevalence of housing need relative to 2017 levels” (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2019, p. 1). As such, it is not certain that these federal housing policies will improve access to safe, stable and affordable housing for LGBTQ refugees.

Federal immigration policy also has a big role to play in the housing outcomes of LGBTQ refugees, as it impacts the kind of aid they receive when they enter Canada. Of particular importance is the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, which sets out to offer “protection to the displaced and the persecuted” (2(a)), as well as “to offer safe haven to persons with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (2(d)). While these goals are laudable, they often come into conflict with the actual aid available to refugees in Canada. As such, federal immigration policy can be interpreted as a form of pinkwashing, a component of homonationalism. Indeed, presenting Canada as a ‘safe haven’ for LGBTQ refugees is in line with pinkwashing as described by Mulé (2019), wherein “the state frames SOGIEs as a vulnerable group protected by equality-based legislation and then holds this SOGIE group up as an example of an enlightened and progressive country” (p. 208). For Mulé (2019), this pinkwashing conflicts with how SOGIE refugees are actually treated in Canada, where they receive inadequate support, as evidenced by the programs discussed below.

The programs that LGBTQ refugees can access when coming to Canada include the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program, the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership. However, both GAR and RAP only offer support for 12 months. Moreover, the income support available



through RAP is comparable to provincial social assistance rates (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2019) – and as such, is inadequate. The Rainbow Refugee Assistance Partnership is a program specifically targeted at LGBTQ refugees. It is also time-limited, offering support for only three months (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2020), and accepts only 15 to 50 refugees per year (Government of Canada, June 2019a). Indeed, if the Rainbow Refugee program was more than just pinkwashing, it should surely offer more support to many more refugees than 50/year *at most*. In light of the limitations of these programs, current immigration policy does not guarantee LGBTQ refugees access to safe, stable and affordable housing in Canada. Further, these policies are in line with the kind of biopolitical abandonment experienced by LGBTQ refugees in Canada, as described by Puar’s (2017) concept of homonationalism. While some queer people are incorporated into the “biopolitical valorization of life” (Puar 2017, p. 9), other queer people—such as LGBTQ refugees—are afforded only the kinds of bare minimum safeguards described above.

#### 5.1.4 International policy

At the international level, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights sets the standard for the right to housing and the protection of LGBTQ rights. The right to housing is enshrined under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as part of the larger right to an adequate standard of living. Importantly, the right to housing should not only be understood as encompassing only a roof over one’s head but “should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity” (OHCHR, 2009, p. 3). Indeed, the right to housing encompasses security of tenure, the right to adequate space and protection from the elements, as well as metrics like affordability, habitability, and accessibility (OHCHR, 2009). While the right to housing is clearly defined at the international level, and provides guidance to governments regarding their duties to rights-holders (i.e. citizens and residents), we have yet to see these elements of the right to housing fully realized in Canada or Alberta. That said, the *NHS* may represent a step toward to the progressive realization of the right to housing, especially in the areas of affordability and

accessibility – two of its areas of focus. However, it is important to note that the ability of programs funded under the *NHS* to address complex and expensive problems such as affordability is contentious, as noted by the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (2019), discussed in the above section on federal policy.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also advises states with regards to how LGBTQ people's rights can be protected and upheld. Indeed, the UN recommends that states take measures to: ensure that LGBTQ people are protected from violence; prevent the torture of LGBTQ people; repeal laws that criminalize LGBTQ people; prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity; and safeguard LGBTQ people's freedom of assembly (OHCHR, 2019). Many of these recommendations are incorporated into Canadian law, such as the prohibition of discrimination, for example. However, despite strong international and domestic standards surrounding the rights of LGBTQ people, queer people nonetheless continue to face issues such as discrimination in housing Canada.

## 5.2 Objective 2: To examine the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees within the Albertan housing system using an Intersectional framework.

In order to better understand the intersectional needs of LGBTQ refugees, this thesis took two approaches: first, it examined the way in which intersectionality was applied (or not) in housing policy at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels; and second, throughout the interviews, I asked questions that tried to drive at the intersection of migration status and queerness. Taken together, these two approaches provide insights into the unique experiences and needs of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta.

### 5.2.1 Policy Analysis

The policy analysis found that many governments attempted to employ intersectionality or similar modes of thinking, but often fell short of doing so effectively. This was most apparent in the identification of vulnerable groups within housing policy. Indeed, all

municipalities identified at least one group experiencing housing vulnerability. For some municipalities, such as Calgary and Wood Buffalo, low-income people were identified as a group experiencing housing vulnerability, but which demographics are likely to experience low-income in their municipality was not unpacked further. In contrast, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer identified specific demographic groups experiencing housing vulnerability, and all named new immigrants or refugees. However, their engagement with intersectionality did not extend beyond this identification.

Overall, municipal policies acknowledged that individuals with certain marginalized identities experience housing precarity, but the root causes of this vulnerability were never truly unpacked. Here it is useful to recall Crenshaw's (1991) observation that intersectionality is not only concerned with identity itself, but with "how the social world is constructed" (p. 1245). This construction is not considered in these documents; it is acknowledged that certain groups are marginalized, but the *why* and *how* of this marginalization is left out of frame. Indeed, the ways in which racism, xenophobia, and homo-, bi- and transphobia enact themselves on the lives of LGBTQ refugees, as well as the ways in which these forces are intertwined, are never meaningfully engaged. In short, these policy documents engaged with issues of vulnerability but never with the issues of power through which this vulnerability emerges. As such, how the construction of this social world can be challenged is left out of frame as well. Policy documents should analyze the systems of power from which housing vulnerability emerges, as it is only through challenges to these systems that vulnerability will dissipate. Further, LGBTQ refugees are never specifically identified as a vulnerable group in any of the documents examined. In light of this, the experiences of refugees in the housing system are assumed to be the same as cisgender and heterosexual refugees, while the experiences of LGBTQ people within housing are understood only with reference to the lives of LGBTQ citizens.

Intersectionality appears in a similarly limited way in provincial and federal documents. In Alberta's 2021 plan *Stronger Foundations*, multiple groups in housing need are identified, including LGBTQ2 people and immigrants and refugees (Government of Alberta, 2021). In the *NHS*, 12 groups experiencing housing

vulnerability are identified, again including LGBTQ2 people and newcomers to Canada. In both cases, the root causes of the housing need experienced by these groups are not unpacked, how their experiences of housing vulnerability will be ameliorated is not stated, and how these groups intersect, or overlap, is not addressed. The failure of all these policy documents to engage deeply with intersectionality and its call to meaningfully consider how experiences of marginalization inform our social world mean that the intersectional needs and experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta remain unaddressed.

A meaningful engagement with intersectionality at the policy level would mean identifying the systems which produce housing vulnerability, thinking critically about the ways in which these systems intersect, and developing solutions to target these intersections. For example, the interviews established that racialized refugees experience issues in housing surrounding both affordability and discrimination, and that these issues emerge from housing commodification and racism. A targeted policy solution to these issues could look like the expansion of the social housing stock and further accountability mechanisms for private landlords. It is important to emphasize that solutions to the problems identified in this thesis are possible, but existing policy is not particularly interested in identifying them.

### 5.2.2 Key-Informant Interviews

Intersectionality was very important to many interview participants, who articulated a commitment to implementing this approach thoroughly. While interview questions were designed to tease out the intersectional experiences of clients, many participants brought up the concept of intersectionality without prompting. They made clear that this was something they thought and cared deeply about; intersectionality informed their work as much as it did mine.

Intersectionality as a concept, as well as the intersectional needs and experiences of LGBTQ refugees, were considered from many different angles throughout the interviews. P6 discussed their own experiences as an LGBTQ refugee, pointing to the lack of intersectional services available to them at the time of their arrival:

“[[t]here wasn’t any service for people like me who are LGBTQ and newcomers. There was a lack of support...for this community.” It was clear that their experience as a newcomer informed the work that they did, as well as their call for temporary housing for LGBTQ refugees (discussed in relation to Objective 3 below). P7 also discussed the need for intersectional services, stating that housing providers must be attuned to the intersectional needs of their clientele that extended beyond housing alone. P7 stated that our current approach to housing “fails to recognize that just because you put somebody in a room with four walls doesn’t solve all their social issues, there’s a lot of other things, that it’s a multi or intersectional problem.” The importance of intersectional thinking, and the issues caused when it does not occur, are highlighted here.

A couple of participants also touched on their frustrations with limited or partial applications of intersectionality. P5 critiqued the way certain organizations do not consider the ways in which vulnerability is produced through systems of oppression, and instead take an additive approach to intersectionality. They expressed frustrations with an organization accounting for different intersections (such as race) only after being called out by others, stating that this organization is “trying to prove that they’re accounting for those different things in a very, you know, second wave liberal feminist wave: ‘oh, we forgot to talk about race. So we can add that...’” In this statement, P5 is emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to intersectionality, where all facets of identity are considered, and the ways in which systems of oppression compound are properly accounted for.

P1 expressed similar frustrations with the way intersectionality is implemented in the *NHS* through the GBA+ approach, stating that this approach fails to consider “power dynamics” and “structural and societal influences” – a shortcoming I also noted during my policy analysis. Overall, it was clear that many participants employed intersectionality to understand the unique experiences and needs of the clients they served, and that policy needs to ‘catch up’ to the intersectional work being done by those working in the housing system, and LGBTQ2- and refugee-serving sectors.

Through both my policy analysis and interviews, I discovered that LGBTQ refugees experienced vulnerabilities that were both specific to their demographic, but

also vulnerabilities that were nearly universal among groups experiencing housing vulnerability. For example, refugee claimants experience heightened housing vulnerability, as they are unable to access income support or other programming like legal aid until their claim is accepted. Moreover, as noted by many participants, LGBTQ refugees also experienced significant discrimination, from both their cultural communities and LGBTQ communities, leaving them with little support. These compounding experiences of discrimination leave LGBTQ refugees with few places to turn, an issue specific to their demographic. That said, I also found that LGBTQ refugees struggled with issues such as affordability, and a dearth of social housing, which were issues faced by many different demographics navigating housing in Alberta. What this means is that those working in the housing system must work to address the specific housing needs of LGBTQ refugees, while also addressing widespread (systematic) issues within housing and income support, as both approaches are necessary to ensure that LGBTQ refugees have access to safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta.

### 5.3 Objective 3: To develop policy recommendation that can account for and remedy the barriers experienced by LGBTQ refugees in the Canadian housing system.

In this section, I present a series of eight recommendations for improving policy to improve the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees. These recommendations are organized into three sections: vulnerability in policy, housing policy, and income support and other programming. Many of these recommendations were inspired by my interview participants, whose insights and ideas provided a foundation for envisioning a housing system that works for vulnerable people, and specifically LGBTQ refugees.

#### 5.3.1 Vulnerability in policy

##### **Improve the experience of IRB adjudication for SOGIE refugees.**

The process of IRB adjudication was identified as traumatic and degrading both in the literature review (Mulé, 2019; Lee & Brotman, 2011) and in the interviews (P2, P5, P4).

The hardships associated with adjudication stem from two primary issues: the need for applicants to: (a) conform to Western understandings of queerness; and (b) recount traumatic instances of violence in order to prove their need to flee their country of origin. This process was described as “horrific” and “dehumanizing” (P2), as well as “traumatic” (P6) by interview participants who had helped their clients prepare for adjudication. It is so arduous that even claimants who are granted status from the IRB may experience a ‘crash’ associated with negative health outcomes in the aftermath of adjudication (Kahn & Alessi, 2018). It is clear that this process needs to change.

There are two changes that could be implemented immediately to improve the experience of adjudication for SOGIE refugees. First, the definition of queerness employed during adjudication should be expanded to be more inclusive of a diversity of cultures and experiences. Currently, the IRB adheres to normative Western narratives surrounding ‘coming out’ and ‘LGBTQ identity’ (Mulé, 2019), which is often paired with a binary understanding of sexual orientation wherein one is gay or straight (P5). Moreover, the IRB seeks proof of homosexual relationships in order to prove one’s sexual orientation, which is not inclusive of bisexual people, many of whom did not have homosexual relationships in their country of origin due to a fear of persecution. As such, the IRB should expand their understanding of queerness beyond a simplistic understanding wherein one is either gay or straight, as well as understand that one’s queerness is not necessarily contingent on relationships with others.

Second, the IRB should not require claimants to provide details of violent and traumatic experiences. Indeed, it should be enough (and is still quite emotionally arduous) for the claimant to state that they experienced violent persecution, without having to provide details in front of a group of strangers. That is to say, the burden of proof placed on claimants to ‘prove’ persecution should be less intense, and not require graphic details of traumatic experiences to be disclosed. Seeking refuge after fleeing one’s country of origin should not be re-traumatizing, and the adjudication process needs to undergo significant changes so this is not the case.

## **Go beyond identifying ‘vulnerable groups’ and identify the root causes of housing vulnerability, as well as ways to tackle them.**

Throughout section 4.1, it is noted that municipal, provincial and federal governments all identify various groups experiencing housing vulnerability within their respective jurisdictions. This is most notable at the federal level with the *National Housing Strategy*, wherein 12 vulnerable groups are identified, including LGBTQ2 people and refugees. However, why these groups are vulnerable and how this vulnerability manifests are not adequately unpacked in the *NHS*, or indeed in any other policy document reviewed for this thesis. This failure to unpack the root causes of housing vulnerability can be stigmatizing and individualizing, as noted in section 2.1, because “vulnerability is predominately understood as feminising and subsequently as negative, scary, shameful, and above all something to be avoided and protected against” (Dahl, 2016, p. 41). As such, governments should not only identify groups experiencing vulnerability in housing, they should also identify the structural causes of such vulnerability, as well as develop targeted solutions.

By failing to unpack vulnerability further in their policies, governments participate in the stigmatization of vulnerable groups, as this attaches housing vulnerability to the individual experiencing it, as opposed to the systems that create it. This could be avoided if the system-level causes of vulnerability are identified. Further, identifying such systematic causes provides a foundation for identifying systematic solutions, which may not only ameliorate existing vulnerability, but reduce future vulnerability. Further, understanding vulnerability from a systems perspective provides a foundation for holding governments accountable, an important component of the right to housing. Specifically, the right requires governments to recognize and act on their duties to rights-holders to ensure everyone has access to safe, stable and affordable housing. Such access cannot be ensured without the identification and targeting of systemic issues within housing.

### 5.3.2 Housing policy

**Provide more resources to help refugees navigate the housing system.**



As noted in section 4.2.2, it can be very difficult for new refugees to navigate Alberta's housing system, and some inadvertently put their housing at risk, as the ways in which housing operates here are not adequately explained. For example, participant P1 explained that often refugees do not understand that issues such as pests should be reported to their landlord or housing provider, as they believe they will be held responsible for issues in their unit. Moreover, participants P7 and P8 noted that accessing social housing is difficult in itself, as the process requires a great deal of form literacy. These difficulties are exacerbated when English is not the first language of the applicant. As such, it is important that refugees are better supported when seeking to access social housing, and are given the kind of tools and information necessary to maintain their housing. This could be achieved in many ways. First, refugees should be provided with a robust explanation of how both market and non-market housing systems operate here. Such information could be delivered by the provider or landlord, or through initiatives like the GAR program. Second, the impetus should be on providers and landlords to ensure that refugees thoroughly understand tenant responsibilities, and to be available to answer questions related to tenancy. Finally, application forms should be simplified to reduce the need for form literacy, and appropriate translation and language assistance should be provided during the application process.

### **Establish temporary housing for LGBTQ refugee claimants.**

As noted by P6, there is a lack of housing available for LGBTQ refugee claimants, particularly before their claim is submitted. This lack of housing stems for the inability of claimants to afford housing—as they are not yet able to access income support—as well as difficulties in accessing emergency shelters due to the threat of violence. As such, it is important that a form of temporary housing is developed for LGBTQ refugees, so they will have a safe place to stay until they can move into stable, permanent housing. Indeed, certain forms of temporary housing for select vulnerable groups already exist, such as women's shelters, which are an invaluable resource for women and children fleeing domestic violence and contending with homelessness. Further, temporary housing for LGBTQ refugees already exists in the United Kingdom, provided

through the organization Micro Rainbow. Micro Rainbow provides safe housing for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees, and as connects them with other services such as employment supports and education (Micro Rainbow, n.d.). Alberta should develop similar temporary housing for LGBTQ refugee claimants, to ensure that all their housing needs can be met while they wait for their claim to be processed and heard.

### **Reduce wait times for social housing by expanding the social housing stock.**

Throughout the interview process, participants identified many different issues stemming from a lack of social housing. The first was the existence of significant waitlists for social housing and related programming (see section 4.2.3), such as rent supplement programs, with some clients waiting for years before they are housed. The second issue was the strict enforcement of the eligibility criteria in social housing. Essentially, when a tenant exceeds the income limit in social housing, they are immediately evicted, which compromises the ability of tenants to achieve both housing stability and financial security. This strict enforcement is necessary, in part, due to the lack of social housing available in Alberta—put simply, “we just don’t have enough” (P1).

This lack of social housing results in the constant need to move tenants out of social housing to make room for others in need. This emphasis can be linked to a taken-for-granted assumption that “the scarcity of social housing [is] an unfortunate but inevitable constraint that [we]...must accept and work around” (Clarke et al., 2022, p. 2). This is to say that, when presented with systemic and enduring shortages of deeply subsidized units, the emphasis of policy and programming can be on managing demand (e.g., through waitlists and prioritization), rather than challenging the underlying lack of supply. This must change if the human right to housing is to be fulfilled. Investing in the social housing system and building enough units to meet demand is absolutely essential in Alberta, and such an investment would solve many of the issues faced by tenants and housing providers alike. Such an investment requires governments to commit to a substantive equality approach to housing—that is, to take on a positive obligation to improve access to material resources, including housing (see Coker, 2000). A

commitment to expanding the social housing stock—instead of re-entrenching the belief that scarcity is inevitable—represents a move towards a substantive equality approach in housing. More research needs to be done by governments to determine the extent of the need for social housing (that is, how many units need to be constructed in order to meet demand) as well as the nature of housing need (such as the size of units needed by households).

### 5.3.3 Income support and other programming

#### **Expand access to legal aid for refugee claimants.**

In their interviews, P4 and P6 identified the inability to access a legal aid attorney as a major barrier for refugee claimants in Alberta. Specifically, refugees in Alberta cannot access a legal aid attorney until after their claim is submitted, despite the fact that the advice and guidance of an attorney would be very beneficial in preparing one's claim. As pointed out by participant P4, the cost of hiring an attorney is prohibitive for many refugees, meaning that they cannot afford to hire one for themselves to help them through the claims process. Because of this, employees within the refugee-serving sector take on the responsibility for helping refugees prepare their claim. The solution is for the Alberta government to make legal aid accessible to refugees before their refugee claim is submitted. This is not without precedent, as British Columbia provides legal aid to refugee claimants (Legal Aid BC, 2022). The benefits of doing so are two-fold: first, refugees would have access to the kind of legal advice they require at every stage of the claims process; and second, employees working in the refugee-serving sector could focus their attention to other areas, freeing them up to help more clients with other issues, including housing.

#### **Expand access to English language courses for refugee claimants.**

Similar to legal aid, English language courses offered through LINC are not accessible to refugee claimants. P4 described this as a major issue in their interview. The inability to register for LINC classes upon their arrival in Alberta poses serious issues for

claimants; it makes it much harder for them to get a job and begin earning an income, more difficult for them to navigate systems like housing, and harder for them to connect with the largely English-speaking LGBTQ community in Alberta. As such, LINC classes should be made available for refugee claimants to help them acclimate to life in Alberta and begin to form connections here.

### **Increase income support and shelter benefits to reflect the cost of living in Alberta.**

The inadequacy of Alberta's income support programs was identified as an issue in both the literature review and the key-informant interviews. Interview participants P1, P2 and P8 emphasized that housing in Alberta remains unaffordable even when individuals are able to access income support programs. In so doing, they underscored the work of groups such as the Maytree Foundation, which has authoritatively documented the inadequacy of social assistance programs across Canada. One Maytree report (Tweedle et al., 2017) discusses the fact that, as of 2016, welfare incomes in Alberta represented on 37.7 percent of the after-tax poverty line in this province (p. 41). A subsequent report states that Albertans on income support exist in a state of 'deep poverty' (Maytree, 2021). Further, research suggests that increasing income support has a measurable impact on poverty, with the poverty rate in Canada falling by one third between 2019 and 2020 with the introduction of the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, or CERB (Government of Canada, March 23, 2022).

It is clear that income support in Alberta needs to be increased in order to meet the needs of low-income households. As such, the rates of income support for programs such as Alberta Works, the Resettlement Assistance Program and AISH should be increased to adequately cover the cost of living, including housing, in Alberta. Further, the support extended for programs like the GAR program should be extended beyond a mere 12 months, to ensure refugees are well-supported at every stage of their settlement journey. As it currently stands, welfare incomes in Alberta fall significantly short of rendering housing affordable for recipients, and therefore contravenes the right to housing, of which affordability is a key component.

#### 5.4 Limitations of this research

It is my hope that future researchers will expand on the research I conducted for this thesis, and in so doing fill the gaps left by its limitations. The most significant limitation is that it did not engage LGBTQ refugees themselves. This is primarily because I did not have adequate (existing) connections with LGBTQ refugees to engage them ethically as participants. It is also important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred throughout the duration of this research, rendered attempting to establish such connections considerably more difficult than usual, as many community and cultural events were cancelled, in-person meetings were periodically prohibited and otherwise discouraged, and people were generally quite busy managing the stresses and challenges of the pandemic in addition to their regular workload. This is to say that, if circumstances were different, I would have endeavored to connect with LGBTQ refugees to engage them ethically as participants in this research, but it was not possible at this time. As such, this research does not give voice to LGBTQ refugees, nor contain first-hand accounts of their experiences of housing vulnerability. Thus, for example, while the research analyzed policy, and asked key informants about the workings and shortcomings of policy from their professional perspectives, it was unable to comment directly on how policy was experienced or navigated by LGBTQ refugees. It does, however, set the stage for a subsequent study to do precisely this, including by indicating potential areas of research focus, such as experiences of refugees navigating both market and non-market housing in Alberta. Such research could explore the kinds of discrimination that was highlighted by my interview participants, or focus on the administrative barriers in social housing, such as the need for a high level of form literacy.

Another limitation of this research is the fact that all interview participants resided in Alberta's two major cities, Edmonton and Calgary, while refugees settle all across the province. As such, the valuable insights that individuals living in smaller Alberta cities could have provided are absent from this research. Future research could focus on smaller cities such as Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Red Deer to examine if and how the experiences of both service providers and LGBTQ refugees in these cities differ from those located in Edmonton and Calgary. It could also broaden the geographical

scope of knowledge around LGBTQ refugees and housing in Canada and engage federal-level agencies and advocates, including Rainbow Railroad, who were invited to participate in this research, but declined to do so. It is important to note that between January and June 2022, Rainbow Railroad has experienced 4,649 requests for aid, making them an invaluable (and likely overworked) organization for LGBTQ asylum seekers and refugees (Rainbow Railroad, 2022).

Finally, this research was dependent on the data available at the time, and in particular, the 2016 Census. As 2021 Census data are released, they could be used to provide an updated perspective on housing and immigration in Alberta. In addition, future research could examine how the housing context changed in Alberta between 2016 and 2021.

## 5.5 Final words

This research establishes a platform of knowledge upon which housing researchers can build, and equips them to engage the study population (LGBTQ refugees) – as well as other groups experiencing intersectional housing vulnerability in Canada – in future studies. Specifically, it combines a multi-level policy analysis (from the scale of municipal policy in Alberta to international law), and key informant interviews with professionals working in the housing system, and LGBTQ2- and refugee-serving sectors, to provide the first account of LGBTQ refugees' housing experiences in Canada. In addition, it connects these empirical experiences with major academic concepts (intersectionality, homonationalism, the human right to housing, and substantive equality) in order to articulate the institutional and systemic nature of the housing vulnerability experienced by LGBTQ refugees. Indeed, the concepts of intersectionality and homonationalism point to the ways in which systems of power and oppression (including, but not limited to, homo- bi-, and transphobia, racism, capitalism and xenophobia) interact to produce compounding experiences of marginalization for LGBTQ refugees. Further, concepts such as substantive equality point to the need for such experiences of marginalization *substantively*, through the distribution of material resources.

To say that writing this thesis was difficult may seem obvious, but it was difficult for reasons that I did not anticipate. It was emotionally arduous and taxing to be constantly confronted with the ways in which LGBTQ refugees were failed by so many systems. However, I was buoyed by the knowledge that there are many people out there (including my interview participants) who are hard at work across the province to create a world wherein LGBTQ refugees no longer need to be labelled as a ‘vulnerable group’ within policy. To say that LGBTQ refugees experience systemic vulnerability within housing is also to point to the ways in which systemic change is necessary and possible. Indeed, this thesis reveals the myriad and compounding ways in which LGBTQ refugees are failed by immigration, housing and welfare policies in Canada and Alberta. It also reveals systemic issues that touch many Albertans—including, but not limited to, LGBTQ refugees—such as how income support does not render housing affordable, and the lack of social housing. While it is true that there is much more research needed into the housing experiences of LGBTQ refugees in Alberta, it is equally true that changing the housing landscape for LGBTQ refugees and other vulnerable groups requires more than just research—it necessitates action and solidarity. It is my hope that one day (in the not-so-distant future) that we will be able to answer a resounding ‘yes’ to the question “Can LGBTQ refugees access safe, stable and affordable housing in Alberta, Canada?”

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## Appendix A: Letter of Initial Contact (e-mail)

Dear [Name],

My name is Kenna McDowell, and I am currently a Masters student at the University of Alberta, completing a thesis exploring access to housing for LGBTQ refugees in Canada. I am also affiliated with Community Housing Canada, a research partnership which seeks to build resiliency within the community housing system. I am contacting you due to your expertise in [this area] to see if you would like to be interviewed for my thesis. Please let me know if you would be potentially interested in participating, and I will send you more information about my thesis and what this interview would entail.

Please note that due to the current state of Covid-19 spread, interviews will be conducted via Zoom or over email, based on your availability and preference.

Thank you for your time!

Best wishes,

Kenna

## Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form

### Information Letter

My name is Kenna McDowell and I am a graduate student in the Human Geography Program at the University of Alberta.

I am conducting a study evaluating access to housing for LGBTQ+ refugees in Alberta. The study explores the ways in which access to housing in Alberta could be improved for this demographic using a legal and policy analysis, as well as key-informant interviews.

I am carrying out this work because in 2017 the federal government released the *National Housing Strategy*, which identified both LGBTQ2 people and refugees as vulnerable populations within the Canadian housing system. However, little research has been conducted surrounding the housing experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees in Alberta.

As part of this study, I am especially interested in hearing the perspectives of people working for housing providers and within housing organizations, people working in refugee- or LGBTQ+-serving organizations, as well as with LGBTQ+ people and refugees with lived experience in Alberta's housing system.

I would like to interview you for my research. This interview would occur via Zoom video conferencing call at a time that is convenient to you, and would last approximately 45 minutes.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and if you agree to be involved, I will provide you with a consent form describing the study and the details of your participation (including protections for anonymity and confidentiality).

This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), with additional support from the University of Alberta.

Please let me know if you would be interested in participating in this research. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study, and to provide more information about what an interview would involve.

Sincerely,

Kenna McDowell  
Masters Student (Human Geography)  
University of Alberta  
[kenna@ualberta.ca](mailto:kenna@ualberta.ca)

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (ID: Pro00113337). For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615.



Consent Form

**INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM for INTERVIEW**

**Study Title: At Home Here? LGBTQ refugees' housing experiences in Canada**

**Study Investigator**

Kenna McDowell

MA Student (Human Geography)

Dept. of Earth & Atmospheric Sciences

University of Alberta

Edmonton, AB

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**Study Supervisor**

Damian Collins

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Edmonton, AB

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t: 780-492-3197

**Background:** This research explores access to housing for LGBTQ refugees in Canada, with a focus on Alberta. It explores the ways in which refugee policy, housing policy, and programs such as social assistance impede or facilitate access to housing for this population.

To find out more about these issues, the research is seeking to interview individuals with expertise in one or more of the following areas: access to housing; refugee policy and settlement; LGBTQ people's rights and housing experiences. You are being asked to participate in this research because you have relevant professional or personal knowledge.

This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC).

**Purpose:** This research examines whether or not LGBTQ refugees are able to access safe, stable, and affordable housing in Canada, with a focus on Alberta. It aims to find gaps or limitations in current policy, as well as identify solutions to barriers that may impede access to housing for LGBTQ refugees.

**Study procedures:** You are being asked to be a participant in this research. This will involve an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

The interview will be conducted either in-person or over video calling (Zoom), at a time that is convenient to you. It will take the form of a conversation about your knowledge and experiences with (a) the housing system; (b) refugee policy and settlement; and/or (c) LGBTQ people's rights and housing experiences.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. After the interview, the recording of our conversation will be transcribed into a written document. I am hoping to interview approximately 15 participants with different areas of expertise related to my research. This work will take place in 2021 and 2022.

Once I have carried out all of the interviews and analyzed what people have told me, I will produce a summary report of preliminary research findings. I will send you a copy of the report if you wish.

**Benefits:** You will not benefit personally from participation in this research. The study may have a social benefit, in the form of better understanding access to housing for LGBTQ refugees in Canada.

**Risks:** I do not anticipate that the interview questions will cause you any harm or discomfort. However, some questions I pose may trigger memories of uncomfortable or upsetting experiences related to housing or migration. Any answers you provide will be entirely confidential, and your opinions on such matters will not be traced back to you or your employer in published results. You are not obliged to answer any questions, or discuss any topics, that you feel uncomfortable talking about.

**Voluntary participation:** You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your involvement is completely voluntary. If you received information about this study from a superior at work, they will not know if you agree or decline to participate in an interview.

You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time while it is in progress without penalty. You also have the right to decline to answer any question or set of questions.

If you agree to participate in the study but change your mind, you can withdraw up to 30 days after the date of your interview. To do so, please contact me via email or telephone, and I will delete both the digital audio file of your interview, and the written transcript. After 30 days it will no longer be possible to withdraw, as the information you provided will be included as data in the research.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Only the interviewer will know that you have participated in this study. The transcript of your interview will be anonymized, meaning that it will not contain any information identifying you.

To protect your confidentiality, only the interviewer and yourself will be involved in the in-person interview or Zoom video call. Zoom video calls will also be password protected. Calls will be recorded on a separate audio-recorder to ensure that recording files are saved and securely stored only by the researcher.

Both the digital audio-recording of your interview and the transcript document will be stored on University of Alberta computers, including password-secured online drives. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to these files.

Reported findings may include direct quotations from your interview. These quotations will not be linked in any way to your name or employer. You will not be able to be identified on the basis of our findings. However, we may use a generic description of your role (e.g. 'housing worker'), to provide context for your comments.

Study data will be securely stored for 5 years after the study is completed, at which time they will be destroyed through deletion of all files.

**Further information:** If you have further questions regarding this study, please contact Kenna McDowell (email: [kenna@ualberta.ca](mailto:kenna@ualberta.ca) or telephone: 780-566-8272) or Dr. Damian Collins (email: [damian.collins@ualberta.ca](mailto:damian.collins@ualberta.ca) or telephone: 780-492-3197).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta (ID: Pro00113337). For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615, or via email at [reoffice@ualberta.ca](mailto:reoffice@ualberta.ca).

## **Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have

additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will retain a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

---

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

---

Date

---

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

---

Date

Once signed, please return this consent form to Kenna McDowell by email (kenna@ualberta.ca).

## Appendix C: Interview guides

### Questions for housing providers and organizations:

What is your opinion of the federal government's *National Housing Strategy*, released in 2017?

- Do you see the *NHS* translating to better housing outcomes for the general population seeking social and affordable housing?
- What about housing outcomes for vulnerable groups?
  - What about for LGBTQ2 people or refugees/migrants?
  - What 'vulnerable group' do you see experiencing the greatest housing need in Alberta?
- How does your organization seek to improve housing outcomes for the 'vulnerable groups' named in the *NHS*?
  - Do you seek to improve housing outcomes for LGBTQ2 people and refugees/migrants specifically?
- What does the *NHS* do well, or successfully accomplish?
- What are some areas where the *NHS* can be improved, if any?

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing market-rate rental housing in Alberta?

- If prompting is required: Do you believe most barriers are related to low-incomes, discrimination, a lack of available housing stock, or inadequate social supports? (etc.)

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing non-market housing in Alberta?

How frequently do you see discrimination (from other tenants or from providers) impact the ability of a tenant to secure adequate housing? What forms of discrimination do you see?

How does one's 'class' as a refugee (for example, a refugee being classified as a GAR v. a privately-sponsored refugee) affect one's ability to obtain adequate housing?

- Are there significant disparities in access to housing (whether market or non-market) between GARs and privately-sponsored refugees?

Can you speak a bit to the social programs available to tenants in Alberta (i.e., Alberta Works, the provincial GAR program, AISH...)? What impact do these programs have on housing access, whether that be positive or negative?

If you could implement one policy change to improve access to housing for tenants in Alberta, what would it be? Note that this could be a policy change affecting the general population, or targeting a specific group (including LGBTQ2 people, refugees, or LGBTQ2 refugees).

What do you consider to be the primary barrier to securing housing for LGBTQ2 people in Alberta? Or What have your LGBTQ2 clients communicated to you regarding the state of housing in Alberta?

What do you consider to be the primary barrier to securing housing for refugees and migrants in Alberta? Or What have your clients who are refugees communicated to you regarding the state of housing in Alberta?

Do these demographics consider themselves able to access safe, affordable and stable housing in this province?

**Questions for refugee-serving organizations:**

Are you familiar with the *National Housing Strategy*, released by the federal government in 2017?

- If no – Move on.
- If yes – Do you see the *NHS* translating to improved housing outcomes for refugees in Alberta?

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing market-rate rental housing in Alberta for refugees?

- If prompting is required: Do you believe most barriers are related to low-incomes, discrimination, a lack of available housing stock, or inadequate social supports? (etc.)

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing non-market housing in Alberta for refugees?

How does one's 'class' as a refugee (i.e., privately-sponsored v. government-assisted) impact one's ability to obtain housing?

How frequently do your clients describe instances of discrimination in Alberta's housing system?

- If discrimination is present, who is discriminating against them? (i.e, landlords, non-market housing providers, other tenants)

Do you believe that social assistance programs available to refugees in Alberta are adequate?

In what way could these social assistance programs be improved to better the lives of refugees in Alberta?



If you could implement one policy change to improve access to housing for refugees in Alberta, what would it be and why?

What do you consider to be the primary barrier to securing housing for refugees and migrants in Alberta? Or What have your clients who are refugees communicated to you regarding the state of housing in Alberta?

Has your organization had any experience of working with refugees who identify as LGBTQ?

- If YES, what housing-related challenges and experiences do they experience/report?

In your opinion, are refugees able to access safe, affordable, and secure housing in Alberta? Why or why not?

## Questions for LGBTQ2-serving organizations:

Are you familiar with the *National Housing Strategy*, released by the federal government in 2017?

- If no – Move on.
- If yes – Do you see the *NHS* translating to improved housing outcomes for LGBTQ2 people in Alberta?

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing market-rate rental housing in Alberta for LGBTQ2 people?

- If prompting is required: Do you believe most barriers are related to low-incomes, discrimination, a lack of available housing stock, or inadequate social supports? (etc.)

What do you see as the primary barrier to accessing non-market housing in Alberta for LGBTQ2 people?

How frequently do your clients describe instances of discrimination in Alberta's housing system?

- If discrimination is present, who is discriminating against them? (i.e, landlords, non-market housing providers, other tenants)
- What *kind* of discrimination do your clients experience? Is it related solely to sexual orientation or gender-identity, or do factors such as race, employment, income (etc.) also play a factor?

Do you believe that social assistance programs (i.e., AISH, Alberta Works) available to individuals in Alberta are adequate?

In what way could these social assistance programs be improved to better the lives of LGBTQ2 people in Alberta?

If you could implement one policy change to improve access to housing for LGBTQ2 people in Alberta, what would it be and why?

What do you consider to be the primary barrier to securing housing for LGBTQ2 people in Alberta? Or What have your LGBTQ2 clients communicated to you regarding the state of housing in Alberta?

Has your organization had any experience of working with LGBTQ people who settled in Canada as refugees?

- If YES, what housing-related challenges and experiences do they experience/report?

In your opinion, are LGBTQ2 people able to access safe, secure, and affordable housing in Alberta? Why or why not?

## Questions for refugees:

Can you speak a bit to your experience accessing housing in Alberta?

- What kinds of housing have you lived in? (market v. non-market)
- Was it easy for you to find housing when you first arrived? Did your access to housing improve over time?

Have you accessed social assistance programs in Alberta? (GAR, Alberta Works, AISH)

- Did you find these programs to be adequate?
- Did they make finding housing easier?

Have you experienced discrimination in housing in Alberta? Please speak to your comfort level about this issue.

- If no – Move on.
- If yes –Who was discriminating against you? What was the nature of this discrimination? How was this resolved? Was it resolved?

Did you find information on how to access housing to be readily available, or did you have to figure things out on your own?

- If you sought information from an organization, which organization? How helpful was the information provided?

What would you describe as your primary barrier to accessing housing in Alberta?

Do you believe that your 'class' as a refugee (meaning, that you are a government-assisted or privately-sponsored refugee) has impacted your ability to access housing?

Are there factors beyond your refugee status that make finding housing in Alberta difficult?

If you are comfortable disclosing, what is your sexual orientation?

In your opinion, are you able to access housing that is safe, adequate, and secure?

## Questions for LGBTQ2 people:

Can you speak a bit to your experience accessing housing in Alberta?

- What complicates your access to housing? What facilitates it?
- What kind of housing have you lived in? (Market v. non-market)

Have you accessed social assistance programs in Alberta? (Alberta Works, AISH)

- Did you find these programs to be adequate?
- Did they make finding housing easier?

Have you experienced discrimination in housing in Alberta? Please speak to your comfort level about this issue.

- If no – Move on.
- If yes –Who was discriminating against you? What was the nature of this discrimination? How was this resolved? Was it resolved?

Did you find information on how to access housing to be readily available, or did you have to figure things out on your own?

- If you sought information from an organization, which organization? How helpful was the information provided?

What would you describe as your primary barrier to accessing housing in Alberta?

Are there factors beyond your sexual orientation or gender identity that render access to housing difficult?

If you are comfortable disclosing, what is your citizenship status?

In your opinion, are you able to access housing that is safe, adequate, and secure?