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IMMIGRATION, HOUSING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICITS IN THE URBAN NORTH:

SITUATING NORTHERN IMMIGRATION POLICY
AND EQUITABLE PROSPERITY WITHIN A
CONTEXT OF CHRONIC HOUSING NEED

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ABSTRACT

Cities across northern Canada are increasingly home to diverse newcomers. The central role these cities play in northern services and extractive resource-based economies means their labour requirements are only growing, a reality reflected in territorial immigration strategies. Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit have experienced a chronic housing crisis since the mid-20th century, which has left many northern Indigenous residents in chronic housing need. Immigration to these cities must be considered within this context. This article assesses the northern housing crisis, situates immigration policy within that crisis, and investigates how these two policy spheres intersect in the North. We review immigration and housing policy documents and analyze immigration data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey. The northern housing crisis, in tandem with northern immigration policy, reveals critical deficits in infrastructure, highlighting vulnerabilities in the capacity of the North to promote equity in Indigenous home sovereignties and to sustainably welcome newcomers.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

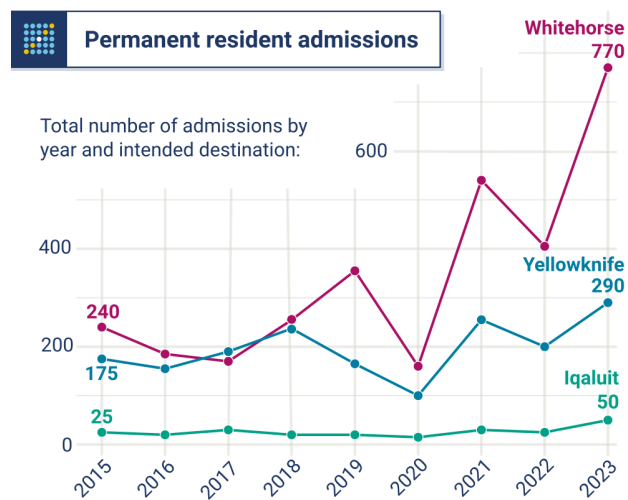
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INTRODUCTION

Cities across northern Canada are home to a growing number of international migrants. The central role these cities play in northern services and extractive resource-based economies means their labour requirements are only growing, a reality reflected in new immigration strategies in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. In Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit, immigrants represent 16% to 21% of employed residents, filling critical labour market gaps, enriching schools, communities, and neighbourhoods, and mitigating the challenges of demographic aging.¹ Meanwhile, northern Canada has experienced a chronic housing crisis since the mid-20th century.² Housing unaffordability in these three urban centres is rising, with rates of core housing need increasing annually while median rents continue to rise and average monthly mortgage payments reach record highs.³ Even as these cities feel the profound effects of the northern housing crisis, they are host to a growing number of newcomers for whom housing is a crucial dimension of their socio-economic integration (see Figure 1). Affordable and accessible housing is critical physical and social infrastructure; it supports social cohesion and economic mobility, reduces inequality, and provides the foundation for individuals and families to fully participate in society. Canada’s infrastructure deficit cannot be resolved without advancing both inclusive housing access and support for Indigenous self-determination in housing.⁴ Immigration to northern cities must, therefore, be situated within the larger context of a housing crisis that already leaves many northern Indigenous residents in chronic housing need.

Figure 1. Admissions of permanent residents by intended destination: Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit, 2015–2023



Data Sources: IRCC, Monthly Updates: Permanent Residents, 2024

We situate this article at the critical nexus between an ongoing northern Indigenous housing crisis rooted in the historical and contemporary outcomes of colonial social policy and the emergence of housing needs for international migrants. Federal and territorial immigration policies actively pursue increased relocation to northern Canada despite the already bare landscape of affordable and accessible housing in the North.

¹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Immigration Matters*.

² Julia Christensen, “Implications of a Northern Corridor on Soft Infrastructure”; Christensen et al., *Housing, Homelessness, and Social Policy in the Urban North*.

³ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Northern Housing Report 2023*.

⁴ Infrastructure Canada, “Building the Canada We Want in 2050.”

Focusing on Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit, this article has three objectives: 1) to assess the northern housing crisis; 2) to situate immigration policy and newcomer settlement needs within that crisis; and 3) to investigate how these two policy spheres (housing and immigration) intersect in the North. We use the term “newcomer” as an umbrella term referring to recently arrived international migrants who fall under a variety of statuses in Canada (e.g., permanent resident, study permit holder, or temporary foreign worker) and have different housing experiences.⁵ We draw our findings from a systematic review of 16 immigration and housing policy documents and our analysis of immigration and housing data from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and Canada’s Core Public Infrastructure Survey.

This article shows that the northern housing crisis, in tandem with northern immigration policy, reveals critical deficits in physical and social infrastructure in northern Canada and highlights vulnerabilities in the capacity of the North not only to promote equity in Indigenous home sovereignties but also to sustainably welcome newcomers. Yet there is a remarkable absence of literature on the ways in which newcomers to northern Canada encounter the housing crisis, even though immigration to northern, rural, and remote regions of the country is a policy priority for both federal and territorial governments. The experiences of newcomers in navigating the intersections between immigration policy and chronic northern housing need remain poorly understood in the research literature, and, as we argue here, are largely absent from territorial housing policy and strategies.

We examine the intersection between northern immigration policy and chronic housing need – a site where, critically, the local and global geographies of racial capitalism and settler colonialism and the lives, livelihoods, and rights of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous, non-white newcomers to Canada become entangled. The very real social, political, and infrastructural dimensions of immigration policy in the settler colonial state are made even more stark when situated within the context of northern Canada.

*“Immigration to northern cities must, therefore, be situated within the larger context of a housing crisis that already leaves **many northern Indigenous residents in chronic housing need.**”*

⁵ Pottie-Sherman et al., “Navigating the Housing Crisis.”

ASSESSING THE NORTHERN HOUSING CRISIS

The Canadian North is characterized by vast amounts of land, relatively small populations, and considerable distances between communities, most of which are connected only by air or water. Much of the region was governed by Canada at arm's length until the Second World War, when the resource-rich "hinterland" and its location along the Arctic coast brought the region's economic and geopolitical potential to national attention. This was largely accomplished through northern settlement and housing policy intended to extend the Canadian social welfare state northward and assimilate northern peoples through culturally imbued health and social programming.⁶ Today, territorial governments play a key role in the provision of public and subsidized housing in the North, which is administered through housing corporations. Public social affordable housing units comprise a larger share of dwellings in Nunavut (46%) than in any other province or territory, followed by the Northwest Territories (14%) and the Yukon (5%).⁷

Combined, Yukon, N.W.T., and Nunavut account for a population of 108,000 across almost 4 million square kilometres – over a third of Canada's total landmass. Yukon is the most urbanized of the three, with over 130 localities, settlements, hamlets, and towns, and one city – the capital, Whitehorse, which had a population in 2021 of 28,201. The next-largest town, Dawson, had a population of only 1,092. N.W.T. has a total of 33 communities, again with only one city: the capital, Yellowknife, with a population in 2021 of 20,340. Five other communities had populations in 2021 between 1,100 (Fort Simpson) and 2,380 (Hay River); the remaining 27 had populations under 1,000. The largest of Nunavut's 28 communities is Iqaluit (again, the territorial capital), which had a population of 7,429 in 2021. Nunavut's population is not quite as concentrated in the capital: 10 other communities have populations between 1,110 (Gjoa Haven) and 2,975 (Rankin Inlet).⁸

The research literature on housing in northern Canada reveals a wide range of key themes. Chief among these is the high rate of core housing need in both rural and urban communities: there are severe deficits in the affordability, adequacy, and suitability of both the private market and public housing stock.⁹ Several scholars have blamed the prevalence of core housing need across the North on state-organized northern settlement schemes, the introduction of modern housing programs, and the subsequent volatility of northern housing policy in the early to mid-twentieth century.¹⁰ Furthermore, the transition to settlement life, combined with the social and economic circumstances that brought Indigenous peoples into northern settlements, has undermined traditional Indigenous livelihoods and prioritized participation in the wage economy.¹¹

⁶ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*.

⁷ Statistics Canada, *Canada's Core Public Infrastructure Survey*.

⁸ Statistics Canada, *Census Profile*.

⁹ Christensen et al., *Housing, Homelessness, and Social Policy in the Urban North*.

¹⁰ Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*; Christensen, *No Home in a Homeland*.

¹¹ Christensen and Hall, "Extracting Indigenous Homes."

Across all three territories, non-market housing plays a critical role in the housing landscape, with housing provided by the public sector or, especially in Nunavut, through staff housing.¹² Such housing is provided either as public housing units designated for government employees or other permanent housing funded by local industry to house staff (for example, grocery store managers or extractive industry employees).¹³ Private market housing tends to be concentrated in urban centres, whereas smaller communities tend to rely more on publicly subsidized housing options. In Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit, non-market housing is a significant source of affordable rental housing, and in Iqaluit, it is the primary source of it.¹⁴ Meanwhile, increasing unaffordability in the private rental market and the rising dominance of real estate investment trusts (REITs), combined with the limited number of public housing units in urban centres, has led to a severe shortage of low-income housing in the larger centres.¹⁵ The high cost of construction materials, the short construction season, shortages of skilled labour, and the high cost of transporting both labour and materials from southern Canada are major challenges to the development of northern housing infrastructure.¹⁶ Moreover, CMHC's 2023 Northern Housing Report revealed a trend within the construction industry away from residential construction and toward engineering construction (e.g., transportation). Researchers identify the shortage of housing as a critical factor in the incidence of homelessness in northern Canada, citing in particular the very low rental vacancy rates in the larger centres.¹⁷

Homelessness first appeared as a policy issue in northern Canada in the late 1990s.¹⁸ Although chronic housing need has been documented in northern communities for decades, social concern around homelessness has largely focused on urban centres. In all three territories, the consensus of advocacy and support groups is that homelessness is on the rise.¹⁹ Indigenous peoples are overrepresented amongst unhoused northern residents, a result of the combined effects of colonial settlement and social policy, the intergenerational effects of colonialism on Indigenous peoples, higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and a lack of adequate and affordable housing in northern communities.²⁰ Racism has also been reported as a factor in both rental housing and employment discrimination in both Whitehorse and Yellowknife.²¹

Altogether, research on housing in northern Canada points to the urgent need for more affordable housing options, in conjunction with support to access and maintain this housing.²² The literature

¹² Sultan, "Solving the housing crisis in Nunavut, Canada."

¹³ Falvo, "Who Pays?"; Falvo, *Poverty Amongst Plenty*.

¹⁴ Christensen et al., "Homelessness across Alaska, the Canadian North and Greenland."

¹⁵ August, "Financialization of Canadian Multi-family Rental Housing"; Christensen et al., "Homelessness across Alaska, the Canadian North and Greenland."

¹⁶ Christensen, "Implications of a Northern Corridor on Soft Infrastructure in the North and Near North."

¹⁷ Schmidt et al., "Trajectories of Women's Homelessness in Canada's Northern Territories"; Agrawal and Zoe, "Housing and Homelessness in Indigenous Communities of Canada's North"; Christensen, *No Home in a Homeland*.

¹⁸ Christensen, *No Home in a Homeland*.

¹⁹ Christensen et al., *Housing, Homelessness, and Social Policy in the Urban North*.

²⁰ Christensen et al., *Housing, Homelessness, and Social Policy in the Urban North*; Peters and Christensen, *Indigenous Homelessness*.

²¹ Christensen, *No Home in a Homeland*; Nelson, "Storied Realities."

²² Christensen et al., *Housing, Homelessness, and Social Policy in the Urban North*.

identifies the need for collaborative approaches, for intergovernmental and interagency cooperation and improved communication, and for specific actions aimed at diversification across the northern housing spectrum: emergency shelters, transitional housing, housing with long-term supports, rental housing, and affordable home ownership.²³ Despite promising developments in the areas of supportive and transitional housing in northern Canada, their success is jeopardized by the lack of a diverse and complete housing spectrum.²⁴

A better understanding of the housing vulnerabilities of international migrant groups is sorely needed. While ongoing research addresses the various dimensions of northern housing as they pertain to Indigenous peoples in northern Canada, studies on the housing experiences and needs of international migrant groups remain limited. Meanwhile, federal and territorial policy increasingly promotes immigration to the northern territories to fill identified labour market gaps.

*“Across all three territories, **non-market housing plays a critical role in the housing landscape**, with housing provided by the public sector or, especially in Nunavut, through staff housing.”*

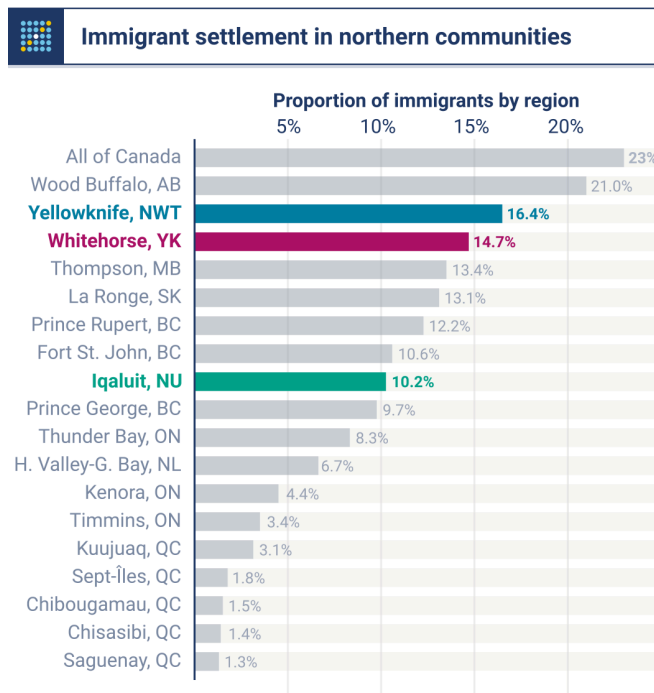
²³ Christensen et al., “Reframing Northern Indigenous Housing Policy in Canada. *International Journal of Housing Policy* (in press); Schiff and Brunger, “Northern Housing Networks.”

²⁴ Freeman and Christensen, “It’s a precarious situation’.”

SITUATING IMMIGRATION POLICY AND IMMIGRANT SETTLEMENT NEEDS WITHIN THE NORTHERN HOUSING CRISIS

Immigrants comprise an increasing share of the population in Yellowknife, Whitehorse, and Iqaluit; each of these capital cities hosts the vast majority of all immigrants in its territory.²⁵ The non-permanent-resident population in these locations is also growing²⁶ – especially in Whitehorse, where demand for temporary foreign workers is rising, as is international student enrolment in Yukon University. While the immigrant proportion of the population in all three cities is below the Canadian average, Yellowknife and Whitehorse notably have higher immigrant proportions than most communities in northern Canada, including the much larger cities of Thunder Bay, Saguenay, and Prince George (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Proportion of immigrants in selected communities in northern Canada, 2021



Data Source: Statistics Canada 2021 Census of Population

The Philippines was the top place of birth for immigrants to all three territorial capitals, accounting for 25% to 30% of immigrants in each.²⁷ Specifically among recent immigrants in Whitehorse, however, India is the most common origin country. Two-step migration is playing a more significant role in Whitehorse where 39% of immigrants admitted since 1980 previously held either a work or study permit, compared to 29% in Yellowknife, 24% in Iqaluit, and 19% in Canada as a whole. These patterns matter when it comes to housing because newcomers have different vulnerabilities, protections, and opportunities depending on their origins, immigration status, socio-economic characteristics, and household composition. But little is known about how these experiences play out in the northern housing continuum in crisis.

²⁵ Statistics Canada, *Census Profile*.

²⁶ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, "Temporary Foreign Worker Program."

²⁷ All statistics in this paragraph are from Statistics Canada, *Census Profile: 2021 Census of Population*.

Immigration became a public policy issue in the territories in 2001 when the Yukon became the first territory to strike an immigration agreement with the federal government, allowing it to establish the Yukon Business Nominee Program in 2004 and the Yukon Nominee Program in 2007.²⁸ In 2009, the Northwest Territories obtained a similar agreement. These agreements – part of the immigration regionalization agenda in Canada since the 1990s – encouraged immigrants to settle outside of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal through provincial and territorial nominee programs, allowing provinces and territories to select immigrants based on regional labour market needs. Today Nunavut is the only jurisdiction in Canada without a nominee program.

The Canadian government increased its immigration targets in 2023, promising to reach and maintain a target of 500,000 new permanent residents annually by 2026 and placing an increased emphasis on regionalizing immigration, including to northern areas.²⁹ This emphasis includes immigration programs such as the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) and Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP), which enable employers in designated communities to recommend applicants to IRCC for permanent residency. Researchers have highlighted the mismatch between the governments' enthusiasm for the regionalization agenda and the availability of settlement services beyond the major immigrant gateways.³⁰ At the time of writing, it is unclear what the recently announced 20% reduction in Canada's immigration levels for 2025–2027 will mean for immigration to the territories.

Housing is clearly a significant immigrant settlement issue in northern locations, both because housing is in short supply and because there are few housing supports for settlement.³¹ In fact, housing was the “number one concern” raised by northern stakeholders during IRCC's 2022 consultations on Canada's immigration levels.³² Newcomers to northern communities report encountering racialized discrimination in the housing market, an experience that has also been long reported by Indigenous northerners.³³ In Yellowknife and Whitehorse, non-permanent-resident households are experiencing core housing need at greater rates than immigrant or Indigenous households.³⁴ Tensions around housing temporary foreign workers have emerged in northern Canada in recent years; media reports indicate that employers sometimes provide rent subsidies for these workers, which some commentators argue is unfair because it disadvantages long-time residents, establishing an “unequal playing field in a territory with an acute housing shortage.”³⁵ In Whitehorse, the CMHC's 2023 Northern Housing Report links “rising rental demand” in Whitehorse to “immigrants in younger age groups.”³⁶ A recent

²⁸ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Agreement for Canada–Yukon Co-operation on Immigration.”

²⁹ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *An Immigration System for Canada's Future*.

³⁰ Preston, McLafferty, and Maciejewska, “Regionalization and Recent Immigrants' Access to Jobs”; Pottie-Sherman et al., “Navigating the Housing Crisis.”

³¹ Amati, Parlee, and Krogman, “Experiences of Opportunity in the Northern Resource Frontier”; Rural Development Institute, *Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps*; Government of Yukon, *What We Heard*; Bell, *Under Pressure*.

³² Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *2022 Consultations on Immigration Levels*.

³³ Chenemu, “Why we are not Exempt from Racism in the North”; Christensen, *No Home in a Homeland*.

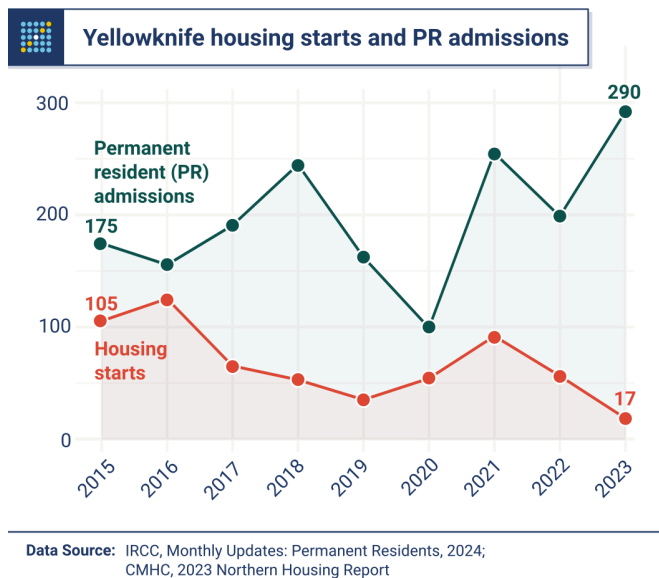
³⁴ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Northern Housing Report 2023*.

³⁵ *CBC News*, “Northern Labour Union Questions TFW Program in Nunavut”; *CBC North Trailbreaker*, “Northern Housing and the Federal Budget”; Croft, “Whitehorse McDonald's Offers Rent Subsidies to Lure Workers North.”

³⁶ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Northern Housing Report 2023*.

slowdown in residential constructions across the territories will negatively impact the existing deficit in housing supply, making it even more difficult for all residents, including newcomers, to find housing (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Admissions of new permanent residents and new housing starts: Yellowknife, 2015–2023



These tensions recently culminated in a temporary pause of the Yukon and N.W.T. nominee programs after both territories filled their base allocations for 2024 much earlier than expected. The Yukon Government cited housing concerns in its decision, which was met with criticism from Whitehorse’s business community, which continues to lobby for increased immigration, and from international students, who find themselves without a postgraduate pathway to permanent residency.³⁷ Federal immigration minister Marc Miller called the growing interest in immigration to the N.W.T. “positive,” although a “sign of pressure on the system.” He explained that “when we talk about more volume to the North,” it is also

important “to make sure that we have proper housing.”³⁸

Meanwhile, discursive practices serve to legitimize northern immigration despite the ongoing socio-economic displacement of northern Indigenous peoples. The research literature on immigration in northern Canada, while limited, underscores the need for a diligent examination of settler colonialism in understanding the northern immigrant settlement landscape. Kelsey Johnson, Geraldine Pratt, and Caleb Johnston argue that new narratives of the multicultural Yukon, for example, rely on familiar tropes about “pioneers” in the “frontier,” and that, while these narratives celebrate positive stories of the settlement of immigrants from the Philippines, they ignore the difficult labour and housing conditions faced by recent arrivals, who often live in overcrowded apartments, trapped in low-wage service jobs.³⁹ While recent literature in the fields of anti-racist and anti-colonial studies has worked to engage intersectionality in the experiences of non-Indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts, where their very ability to relocate and make homes is dependent upon the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands, immigration policy in Canada nevertheless presupposes and reinforces the legitimacy of the settler colonial state.⁴⁰ The persistent northern Indigenous housing crisis is itself the result of

³⁷ Chishti, “International Students and Grads Anxious”; Gabrielle Plonka, “Yukon Nominee Program Paused after Receiving Nearly 600 Applications.”

³⁸ Blake, “Q&A: How Ottawa Says It’s Supporting Immigration in NWT.”

³⁹ Johnson, Pratt, and Johnston, “Filipinos Settle in the Canadian North.”

⁴⁰ Dhamoon, “A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism”; Patel, Moussa, and Upadhyay, “Complicities, Connections, and Struggles.”; Ellermann and O’Heran, “Unsettling Migration Studies.”

historical and contemporary colonial social policy that aims to free up Indigenous lands for resource extraction and state sovereignty purposes:⁴¹ a political economy that simultaneously marginalizes Indigenous peoples and necessitates immigration to fill gaps in the labour market. That the international movements of these very migrants are themselves driven by global geographies of racial capitalism and settler colonialism makes the dynamics of chronic northern housing need in the context of contemporary immigration policy all the more significant, and a robust policy response all the more pressing.

⁴¹ Christensen and Hall, “Extracting Indigenous Homes.”

THE INTERSECTION OF HOUSING AND IMMIGRATION IN THE NORTH

While recent government consultations on immigration in the North have highlighted housing concerns, there is little to no mention of immigration in any territorial housing strategy. Territorial immigration strategies in the Yukon and N.W.T. have also been largely silent on housing matters (Table 1). The Yukon’s 2010 immigration strategy made no reference to housing concerns, nor did a 2020 backgrounder document that formed the basis of consultations on an upcoming immigration strategy for the territory. However, a 2021 consultation summary (titled *What we Heard*) indicates that housing supply was a significant concern raised by stakeholders, who “urged the department to make housing a strategic priority for the upcoming decade.”⁴² In the N.W.T., there has only been one official immigration strategy, established in 2017 and now extended to 2025. Both it and the territory’s 2023 performance report state that those recently arrived in the N.W.T., “whether employees or business owners, face many challenges with their settlement and integration, such as securing housing, registering in education, improving language skills, and integrating into the local culture.”⁴³ No further elaboration is provided, nor are any recommendations made with respect to housing in these documents.

Table 1. References to housing in government immigration strategy documents: Yukon and Northwest Territories

Immigration strategy	References to housing (#)
Yukon Government (2010). <i>The Labour Market Framework for Yukon: Immigration Strategy</i> .	0
Government of Northwest Territories (2017). <i>Northwest Territories’ Immigration Strategy 2017 to 2022: Building a Skilled Workforce and a Vibrant Economy</i> .	1
Yukon Government (2020). <i>Backgrounder and Discussion Document on a New Immigration Strategy for Yukon 2020-2030</i> .	0
Yukon Government (2021). <i>What we Heard: Immigration Strategy Public Engagement June 2021</i> .	9
Government of Northwest Territories (2023). <i>Northwest Territories Immigration Strategy: Performance Measurement Technical Report 2017 to 2022</i> .	1

⁴² Government of Yukon, *What We Heard*, 28.

⁴³ Government of Northwest Territories, *Immigration Strategy*, 14.

As Table 2 shows, there are 11 current housing strategies and action plans in place across the three territories, including a housing strategy that encompasses Inuit Nunangat as a whole, which includes the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the N.W.T. as well as the territory of Nunavut. These housing strategies reflect the intergovernmental approach to housing governance in the North, with the administration of housing provided at the territorial or Indigenous self-government level, and funding and policy direction provided at the federal level, largely through the CMHC.

The territorial government's *Housing Action Plan for Yukon 2015–2025* does not mention immigration or housing for newcomers, nor were any immigrant advocacy groups involved in the consultation process behind the Plan.⁴⁴ Likewise, the *3-Year Action Plan CMHC-Yukon Bilateral Agreement 2019–2022* does not include any language pertaining to immigration, temporary foreign workers, or international students and their housing needs.⁴⁵ The Auditor General's 2022 report *Yukon Housing* found that between 2015 and 2021 the waitlist for social housing grew by 320% – but noted that the Yukon Housing Corporation's definition of housing priority groups was outdated and not in line with those of the 2017 national housing strategy, which identified newcomers as a vulnerable group.⁴⁶

*“While recent government consultations on immigration in the North have highlighted housing concerns, **there is little to no mention of immigration in any territorial housing strategy.**”*

⁴⁴ Yukon Housing Corporation, *Housing Action Plan for Yukon*.

⁴⁵ Yukon Housing Corporation, *3-Year Action Plan*.

⁴⁶ Auditor General of Canada, *Independent Auditor's Report: Yukon Housing*.

Table 2. References to immigration in government housing strategies: Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut

Housing strategy	References to immigration (#)
Government of Yukon, Yukon Housing Corporation (2015). <i>Housing Action Plan for Yukon 2015–2025</i> .	0
City of Whitehorse, Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN), Ta’an Kwäch’än Council (TKC), and Yukon Government (2017). <i>Safe at Home: a Community-Based Action Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness in Whitehorse, Yukon</i> .	0
City of Yellowknife, Community Advisory Board on Homelessness (2017). <i>Everyone Is Home: Yellowknife’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness</i> .	4
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (2019). <i>Inuit Nunangat Housing Strategy</i> , April.	0
City of Whitehorse, Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN), Ta’an Kwäch’än Council (TKC), and Yukon Government (2020). <i>Safe at Home: Ending and Preventing Homelessness in Yukon. Our Progress 2017–2020</i> .	0
Government of Northwest Territories (2020). <i>NWT Housing Action Plan 2019–2022</i> , March.	0
City of Whitehorse (2021). <i>Acommodating Future Residential Demand in Whitehorse. Background Report Prepared by Planning and Sustainability Services, City of Whitehorse</i> , August.	0
Government of Northwest Territories (2021). <i>A Strategy for Renewal of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation</i> , October.	0
Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2022). <i>Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly: Yukon Housing</i> .	1
Government of Northwest Territories (2022). <i>Housing NWT Action Plan 2022–2025</i> , March.	0
Government of Nunavut, Nunavut Housing Corporation (2022). <i>Nunavut 3000: Innovation and Partnerships to Expand Nunavut’s Housing Continuum</i> .	0

Similarly, the *Strategy for Renewal of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation* is silent on immigration or newcomer housing needs. Now called Housing NWT, the corporation has a mandate to provide affordable housing for northern residents; however, there is no language in the *Housing Northwest Territories Act* that includes immigrants to the territory within their scope of services or responsibility.⁴⁷ The *Housing NWT Action Plan 2022–2025* likewise includes no mention of housing needs for immigrants; it is focused solely on the housing needs of northern residents currently in social housing or on waitlists for social housing. There are residence requirements for accessing social housing waitlists that preclude any newcomers to the territory from having their names added.

The initiative Nunavut 3000, or Igluliuqatigiingniq (“building houses together”), sets out the goal of building 3000 new housing units for Nunavummiut by 2030. This territorial housing plan specifically targets the persistent housing crisis for Inuit and does not include the housing needs of newcomers to the territory. Housing for non-Inuit in the territory is generally expected to be provided through staff housing: subsidized rental housing for both short- and long-term government employees.⁴⁸ There are 1,728 staff housing units in Nunavut, representing 15% of all dwellings in the territory. These dwellings are privately owned but managed by the Nunavut Housing Corporation, with rents determined through a standard formula and not exceeding 30% of the employee’s income. The Yukon has a much smaller staff housing program, with 153 staff houses available for priority workers outside of Whitehorse; the N.W.T. does not have a staff housing program.⁴⁹

Yellowknife’s *10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* contains three references to “newcomer” and one to “immigrant” and states that “Housing First, from a northern perspective, requires specific tailoring for the needs of unique populations including Indigenous peoples, youth, immigrants, women and children fleeing violence, and seniors.”⁵⁰ This document also notes that “Newcomers to Canada are often under-represented in homeless counts, but nevertheless experience hidden homelessness. The challenges they face are compounded by race, language, and cultural barriers as well as gender roles and expectations.” However, with the exception of emergency shelter and supportive housing provided through the non-profit sector (such as the YWCA and the Yellowknife Women’s Society), there is no public housing provided to newcomers directly by the territorial or municipal governments.

While immigration and housing strategies represent important democratic decision-making structures and have the potential to contribute to more inclusive housing outcomes in northern cities, they are thus far largely operating in silos, as the tables above make clear. At both the territorial and municipal levels, these documents highlight how inadequate the residential infrastructure in the North is to meet the current demand for housing and allow for the development of additional, much-needed supporting housing programs. While the National Housing Council’s 2023 *Renewing Canada’s*

⁴⁷ *Housing Northwest Territories Act*.

⁴⁸ Sultan, “Solving the housing crisis in Nunavut, Canada.”

⁴⁹ Vector Research, *Yukon Government Staff Housing Scoping Analysis*; Government of Nunavut, *Government of Nunavut Staff Housing Policy*.

⁵⁰ Turner et al., *Everyone is Home*, 46.

National Housing Strategy emphasized repurposing Crown-owned buildings for the development of housing stock, this approach offers little benefit in the context of northern Canada, where there is no supply of underutilized Crown-owned infrastructure.⁵¹ Moreover, its emphasis on supporting non-market housing providers carries little weight in the context of the territories, where even in urban areas the non-profit sector is very limited and already over-burdened by providing supportive housing programs with few resources.⁵² The existing strategies employed in the North to address the housing crisis are limited in scope, and targeted specifically at the persistent housing needs of northern residents; they do not address the intensifying housing needs of newcomers to northern Canada.

⁵¹ National Housing Council, *Renewing Canada's National Housing Strategy*.

⁵² Freeman and Christensen, "It's a Precarious Situation!"

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Our analysis underscores the role of housing as a critical dimension of understanding international migration and calls for further research addressing the housing experiences of newcomers to Canada's North. With a few exceptions, research on the settlement experiences of newcomers in northern locations remains limited. There is a need for a comparison of the housing experiences of immigrants across northern Canada that considers how to mitigate the potential prioritization of immigrant housing needs over housing for low-income northerners. The challenges faced by international migrants to the North are rarely discussed in popular media, policy discourse, or research into northern housing. What are the effects of the northern housing landscape on recent immigrants, and how do they cope with these effects? How is persistent northern housing insecurity experienced by an emerging and potentially vulnerable group of recent immigrants? And what to make of these experiences in the context of an already long-existing housing crisis for northern Indigenous peoples?

The housing system in Canada tends to prioritize market measures with respect to meeting housing demand, whereas the northern territories have relied on public measures since the introduction of modern housing programs in the mid-20th century. This tension lies at the heart of criticism of contemporary northern housing policy.⁵³ At the same time, immigration itself is largely seen as a market matter, not a social one, and the convergence of immigration and housing policy in northern Canada betrays a stubborn blindness to the market limitations surrounding the development of housing infrastructure in the North. It is clear there exists a passive policy approach that the housing market is expected to absorb newcomers, yet in northern Canada the housing market and its threadbare infrastructure simply do not allow for this flexibility. And when they do, what is the cost to unhoused northern residents, a disproportionate number of whom are Indigenous?

While the urban North is small relative to cities in southern Canada, northern cities nevertheless serve as critical places for the examination of settler-coloniality and its permutations via policy and infrastructure.⁵⁴ Our analysis of northern immigration and housing policy shows that the expansion of immigration amidst an already-existing northern housing crisis poses significant ethical and political concerns in its potential to further marginalize Indigenous home sovereignties while also neglecting the social and infrastructural requirements for northern immigrants to feel at home. Together, these misaligned policies reflect the increasing entanglement of northern urban centres in local and global geographies of racial capitalism and settler colonialism, speaking to new convergences in the infrastructures of empire.⁵⁵

⁵³ Christensen et al., "Reframing Northern Indigenous Housing Policy in Canada."

⁵⁴ See Clements, Searle, and Alizadeh, "Epistemic silences in settler-colonial infrastructure governance literature."

⁵⁵ See Cowen, "Following the Infrastructures of Empire."

Colonial reproduction is at the heart of the discursive and material consequences of the policy silences we have highlighted here. There is an urgent need for an anti-colonial approach to addressing gaps in data that illuminates the interconnections between the immigration and housing experiences, while also advancing Indigenous home sovereignties. With this in mind, we make the recommendations below.

Recommendation 1: Advance decolonization efforts within housing systems to support sustainable Indigenous self-determination in housing. While these efforts are underway, progress is slow. A commitment is needed from both the territorial and federal levels of government to learn from Indigenous communities and self-governments on necessary resources and policy changes. Greater support for Indigenous self-determination in housing also means more capacity for territorial housing corporations to re-envision their scope to include newcomer housing needs.

Recommendation 2: Prioritize the collection of data and research on newcomer housing needs and experiences in northern Canada. This research should identify critical gaps in the housing landscape, and explore where and by whom these gaps are felt most critically when it comes to recent arrivals to the territories. Including this data in territorial housing statistics alongside research by newcomer-oriented advocacy groups and service providers can illuminate newcomer housing needs and priorities.

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