



BUILDING SUPPORTS

PHASE III: POLICY COMPONENT
Policy Brief Summary

Acknowledgements

Building Supports Project Team

Jill Atkey

Director, Research and Education, BC Non-Profit Housing Association

Joanne Baker

Executive Director, BC Society of Transition Houses

Louise Godard

Building Supports Project Coordinator

Margaret Jackson

*Director, The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children
Professor Emerita, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University*

Hannah Lee

Manager of Member Services, BC Society of Transition Houses

Sarah Yercich

*Research Associate, The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children
PhD Candidate, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University*



Report Prepared by Margaret Jackson, Sarah Yercich, Louise Godard, and Hannah Lee (2018)

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Policy Brief Summary

This Policy Brief Summary provides an overview of the *Building Supports Project: Housing Access for Immigrant and Refugee Women (IRW) Leaving Violence* (hereafter referred to as the Building Supports Project), and, specifically, the third phase of this research (i.e., the policy component). It outlines the key issues, themes, and recommendations that are detailed in the body of the Building Supports Project Phase III report.

The policy component of this project focuses on provincial (i.e., British Columbia) and select federal policy barriers, practices, and recommendations/solutions to reduce or eliminate the obstacles that exist for IRW leaving violence and abuse to obtain safe and secure short- and long-term housing. In this document, an intersectional analysis considers how policies relevant to that goal, such as housing, immigration, refugee, and settlement,¹ and health have common themes in their individual perspectives.

Through the policy analysis, many themes and barriers emerged, some of which were specific to a single sector, such as housing, immigration, refugee, and settlement, or health. Many of the critical themes that resulted from this research, however, were overlapping and interconnected. The key themes highlighted throughout the analyses include gendered violence and gender-specific considerations (e.g., the gendered nature of the immigrant and refugee experience), well-being of children, financial (in)security, safety and well-being, and language and cultural safety.² Further, central to these critical themes are examinations of intersectionalities³ and the interconnected nature of these issues, including, but not limited to,

¹ In this report the term “settlement” includes social and economic integration.

² The concept of cultural safety originated and was developed for providing safe, empowering, and dignifying services to and within Indigenous communities in Australia; however, this translates to a Canadian context, as Indigenous peoples in Canada “have experienced a history of colonization, and cultural and social assimilation through the residential schools program and other policies leading to historical trauma and the loss of cultural cohesion” (Brascoupé & Waters, 2009, p. 7). The Building Supports research team acknowledges this heritage, and, for the purposes of this project, has chosen to apply the concept of cultural safety to work with immigrant, refugee, and non-status populations to emphasize the importance of culturally safe and empowering service provision. Cultural safety is the preferred term selected by the research team and is reflected in many places throughout the Phase III policy analysis. Terms such as cultural competency and culturally appropriate service provision do, however, appear throughout this report, as these terms were used within much of the literature and reflect the original author’s voice.

³ An intersectional analysis can be informed by developments in gender equality analysis, critical race analysis, disability rights analysis and equality rights jurisprudence. These strategies have developed to address the stereotypes, as well as the unique and intersecting experiences of individuals, because of race or gender or disability and form a necessary part of the contextual and analytical

commonalities and gaps.

This Policy Brief Summary is divided into five sections: 1) project overview, including the structure, approach, and methodology⁴ for the Phase III policy component; 2) immigration, refugee, and settlement-specific findings and analysis; 3) housing-specific findings and analysis; 4) health-specific findings and analysis; and 5) an abridged grid of overall and sector-specific recommendations. The sector-specific sections include research findings, policy analysis, and core recommendations. The recommendations grid within this Policy Brief Summary provide a comprehensive point form list of the overall barriers and recommended changes that were identified in and developed from these analyses.

Building Supports Project: Introduction, Background, and Foundations of the Research

The Building Supports Project is a collaborative multi-phase community-based project co-led by British Columbia Non-Profit Housing Association (BCNPHA), British Columbia Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH), and The FREDA Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children (School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University). The overall purpose of this project is to identify and understand the barriers IRW face in accessing short- and long-term housing when leaving violent and abusive relationships.

Each phase of the Building Supports Project aims to address the varying and intersecting socio-legal dynamics faced by IRW leaving violence and abuse. The three phases of the project are:

1. Phase I, the research component, which is now completed (Building Supports Project Phase 1 Final Report: Housing access for immigrant and refugee women leaving violence, 2015; Building Supports Project Phase 1 Infographic, 2015);
2. Phase II, Promising Practices and an ongoing provincial awareness campaign, “You are not alone” (Building Supports Project, 2016; “Building Supports Promising Practices Guide,” 2015); and
3. Phase III, the policy component, which is the focus of this report.

framework. In some measure, an intersectional analysis can address social conditions relating to poverty, low income and homelessness. More information on intersectional analysis is available at: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/intersectional-approach-discrimination-addressing-multiple-grounds-human-rights-claims/applying-intersectional-approach>

⁴ See the note on methodology on page 24 of this Policy Brief Summary.

The policy component is grounded in the Building Supports Project Phase I Report findings, which identified several policy barriers⁵ that affect IRW’s ability to leave violence and abuse and secure short-and long-term housing. In addition to identifying many more such policy barriers, however, the policy component focuses on identifying, analyzing, and making recommendations related to practices and policies that can facilitate the removal of the barriers to safe, secure, and affordable housing for IRW and their children. Further, as explained in the body of this report, barriers related to policy and practice were not just experienced in the housing sector, but also in other related sectors (e.g., immigration, refugee, and settlement and health). Thus, the overall focus for Phase III of the Building Supports Project is on the policies and practices in these sectors, with an emphasis on potential intersections and/or how these sectors may operate in silos, as well as suggested solutions/recommendations to address perceived gaps, disjunctures, and needed policy reform.

The Phase III Policy Analysis: Overview and Research Approach

The general approach to, and methodological framework for, the policy analysis of IRW’s experiences in the contexts of (1) immigration, refugee, and settlement, (2) housing, and (3) health were informed by the primary focus on safe housing for IRW leaving violence and abuse, with an emphasis on how to best secure short- and long-term housing for these women and their children. The overall goal of the three-phase project that is to *identify the experiences of immigrant/refugee women in securing safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate housing after leaving violence and abuse*. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the barriers to housing access for immigrant/refugee women leaving violence.
2. Identify and develop promising practices for transition house workers so that they are enabled to support IRW in accessing longer-term, affordable and culturally-appropriate housing.
3. Identify provincial and select federal policy solutions to reduce or eliminate barriers that exist for IRW in accessing long-term housing; and,

⁵ The key policy barriers identified through Phase I of the Building Supports Project were: 1) discrimination; 2) income assistance policies; 3) legal / immigration status; 4) legal aid; 5) BC Housing policies; and 6) access to health care.

4. Articulate action plans for effecting policy change for two of the project partners, BCSTH and BCNPHA.

The third and fourth objectives were the focus of the Phase III Policy Analysis. The intended long-term outcome of the project is to reduce policy barriers faced by IRW through the identification of practical and collaborative solutions for practice and policy to ensure they can safely leave violent relationships without increasing risks to their safety and well-being⁶ through their securing of short and long-term safe and affordable housing. To achieve these objectives, the research team determined the initial necessary step of developing a policy lens from which to identify and critically examine policy barriers.

Phase III began with a broad overview of the resources and materials which consider the challenges and barriers for IRW leaving violence and abuse, grounded in these women's experiences with securing short- and long-term housing for their own, and their children's, safety and well-being. Further, as initially detailed, the research and policy analysis were developed using an intersectional feminist approach when examining the key areas of policy, primarily in the housing, immigration, refugee, and settlement, and health sectors, and guided by questions such as:

1. What are the intersections between IRW's experiences in settlement, housing, and health sectors?;
2. How do policies and practices within these three sectors interlink, and what are the impacts of these linkages on IRW's experiences, especially while leaving violent and abusive homes and/or relationships?; and,
3. How do other intersecting factors (e.g., legal status, poverty, gender) affect each of these three sectors and/or the linkages between these sectors, as well as their policies and practices?

As well as informing the development of the overall action plans, the policy documents generated in Phase III of the Building Supports Projects will be shared with policy makers and government officials at both the provincial and federal levels. In addition, the research team will also share these policy documents and the knowledge from the project with their broader

⁶ "Well-being" here primarily references physical and mental health.

networks of researchers, policy makers, and service providers, including British Columbia's (BC) Provincial Office of Domestic Violence (PODV), BC Housing, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and health sector partners.

Overarching Recommendations

The overall policy analysis resulted in intersecting recommendations that impact all three sectors (i.e., immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, and health).⁷ The primary outcome intended from this policy research is the identification of those recommendations which would assist in securing the safety and well-being of IRW. The key intersecting recommendations are to:⁸

- Create **awareness** of available supports and resources, which is key to provide sufficient support for the safety of IRW leaving violence and abuse. Within this context, awareness includes: 1) linking IRW with resources; 2) raising awareness of, and providing accessible information about, existing available supports and resources; and 3) advocacy related to navigating systems (e.g., immigration, refugee, and settlement, legal, housing, health, child protection).
- Support and improve **rights-based protections** for IRW related to knowledge of/access to systems, lack of legal support, precarious legal status, gender discrimination, and related inequalities. These improvements can be achieved through: 1) increasing IRW's access to legal aid, accessible legal information, and resources (e.g., language, awareness); and 2) providing accessible legal supports and additional support and funding for existing programs that aid IRW in navigating Canadian systems (e.g., legal, immigration, housing, health).
- **Reduce poverty and underemployment among IRW** through initiatives such as: 1) reviewing and improving access to income assistance; 2) acknowledging foreign credentials; and 3) supporting settlement agencies to work in collaboration with employers.
- Minimize the barriers and access issues IRW face related to **language**. Examples of potential solutions and supports are: 1) supporting the development of language classes for newcomers; 2) providing opportunities for language training and education to IRW; and 3) addressing language barriers in the provision of services (e.g., by providing access to interpreters).

⁷ The recommendations, both generally and those specific to each sector, are situated within social justice and human rights frameworks, as these values are central to the policy recommendations.

⁸ Further detail of the highlighted overall and sector-specific recommendations detailed in this Policy Brief Summary are located in section 6 of the full report.

- Foster and support **collaboration, coordination, and communication** between and among systems (e.g., immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, health, legal), which can be achieved through initiatives such as: 1) enhancing cross-sector collaboration; 2) improving coordination and collaboration between justice systems (e.g., criminal, family); and 3) community consultations and engagement.

Immigration, Refugee, and Settlement: Key themes and recommendations

Within this report, the focus on immigration, refugee, and settlement policies provides the backdrop for both the housing and health policy analyses. IRW's experiences obtaining secure, safe short- and long-term housing are the primary lenses through which the policy analysis occurs. However, due to the unique experiences, circumstances, and barriers of IRW (e.g., legal status, language) these analyses must be based in a clear, critical understanding and analysis of the overall, and oftentimes intersecting, immigration, refugee, and settlement policies in Canada. These analyses include, but are not limited to, the primary Canadian immigration and refugee policy landscapes (e.g., settlement patterns, sponsorship considerations, the Canadian *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, the role of settlement services), and policy barriers (e.g., limited legal aid/assistance, employment, risk of deportation, discrimination).

The main themes resulting from the overall analysis demonstrate key considerations for approaching policy and practice related to supporting immigrant and refugee populations in Canada, such as key indicators for successful immigration, settlement, and integration. For example:

1. **welcoming communities**, accessible/affordable/sustainable, adequate short- and long-term housing;
2. **sufficient employment and income**; and
3. **refugee-specific considerations** (e.g., short timelines and supports provided for Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds (H&C) applications, cultural safety issues).

In addition, challenges were identified, such as detention of irregular arrivals, the shift toward Temporary Foreign Worker permits in recent years, housing policies and markets in

Canada, and concerns regarding “one size fits all” approaches to policy and practice, which often do not meet the needs of diverse groups such as immigrants and refugees.

Interlinking considerations within the immigration, refugee, and settlement policy analysis demonstrate the intersectional and complex nature of IRW’s experiences in Canada, especially within the contexts of leaving violence and abuse and seeking safe, secure short- and long-term housing. These intersectional issues are highlighted through analyses of potential gender bias in federal and provincial immigration policy, child protection concerns, and forced marriage. Further, the interlinking nature of service provision is emphasized through a discussion of how IRCC operates in conjunction with other services, as well as the need for more collaboration and communication when assisting IRW in Canada (e.g., an integrated service model approach). This discussion is further grounded in a detailed overview of existing provincial and local supports and initiatives that provide support for immigrant and refugee populations and, more specifically, IRW leaving violence and abuse, such as the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR)⁹, British Columbia’s *Family Composition* policy and exemptions for persons leaving violence and abuse, the British Columbia Employment and Assistance Program and additional employment supports (e.g., MOSAIC’s programming).¹⁰

Key Immigration, Refugee, and Settlement Recommendations

Through the above noted immigration, refugee, and settlement landscape and policy analysis, primary policy barriers and core issues were identified. Resulting from this analysis, the research team made many recommendations. The key immigration, refugee, and settlement recommendations are to:

- Focus on **community integration** for IRW by placing an emphasis on welcoming communities and building community capacity.
- Improve the **supports available through IRCC** by reviewing IRCC policies (e.g., income assistance for vulnerable newcomers and standardization of intake and accounting/recording practices across Canada).

⁹ At the time this research was conducted, the Ministry was titled Social Development and Social Innovation (SDSI).

¹⁰ MOSAIC provides settlement services, employment services, language and counselling, intercultural competency training, and interpretation and counselling, to address the needs of refugee claimants and other refugee status and stateless individuals.

- **Minimize potential vulnerabilities and harms** IRW face in the process of immigration and settlement, such as: 1) addressing delays to immigration applications and processing; 2) improving the expedition of temporary work permits; and 3) conducting additional and on-going review of sponsorship laws and processes in cases of IRW who are abused by their sponsors.
- Address **gender bias and discrimination** by completing a gendered analysis of the *Balanced Refugee Reform Act* and the *Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act*, and conducting a gender and safety audit of all existing programs.
- Shift the **burden of proof** from IRW applying for exemptions to IRCC or Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) instead.

Housing: Key themes and recommendations

Building on the immigration, refugee, and settlement policy analysis framework, the housing policy analysis lays the groundwork for access to housing as a fundamental human right in Canada, as well as the challenges related to accessing the right to housing for vulnerable populations such as IRW leaving violence and abuse. This analysis also highlights the many barriers to crisis, short- and long-term housing, as well as housing supports, faced by IRW leaving violence and abuse, such as language, legal status, social supports, limited access to culturally safe services, and lack of knowledge of, or even access to, Canadian systems (e.g., healthcare); these access issues and barriers compromise IRW's ability to flee violence and locate safe, appropriate short- and long-term housing.

Emerging from the systematic literature review and key informant interviews undertaken specifically for the Phase III component (see the note on methodology on page 24 of this Policy Brief Summary), the housing analysis establishes the housing trajectories of newcomers to Canada, which demonstrates many intersections between immigration, refugee, and settlement and housing (e.g., welcoming communities, markers of successful settlement, economic and social capital, incoming migration class). This analysis also contextualizes housing as a key component of settlement, as well as one of the core indicators of successful settlement and integration for newcomers to Canada.

The housing policy analysis emphasized the three primary challenges related to locating housing in BC, which are:

- 1) **supply** of housing and securing affordable housing;
- 2) **affordability** and the lack of affordable housing; and
- 3) **integration and collaboration** between government and community agencies.

In line with concerns regarding supply and affordability of appropriate, safe, and secure short- and long-term housing, the housing policy analysis provides considerations related to relative and absolute homelessness among immigrants and refugees in Canada, as well as a discussion of acceptable (i.e., adequate condition, suitable size, and affordable) versus core needs (i.e., poor condition, inadequate size, and/or unaffordable) housing. This analysis demonstrates how these challenges are further impacted by experiences of violence and IRW's search for housing after leaving a violent and abusive relationship.

The barriers to accessing and obtaining secure, appropriate, acceptable housing for newcomers in Canada generally, as well as IRW leaving violence and abuse more specifically, were highlighted within the Phase III literature review. These barriers were broken down into three categories:

- 1) **primary barriers** (i.e., experiences of violence based on gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion);
- 2) **secondary barriers** (i.e., adverse or non-existent credit history, family size, lack of awareness about available systems and services, language, legal status, poverty/low-income/insufficient employment, no references/guarantor, and social isolation); and
- 3) **macro-level barriers** (i.e., affordability, systemic bias and discrimination, lack of cultural competence and safety in systems and services, informal "no child" policies at rental properties, overcrowding).

Key Housing Recommendations

Through the above noted housing policy analysis, key policy barriers and issues were identified. The key housing recommendations are to:

- **Improve IRW's access to available housing** by creating and disseminating clear messages about housing availability, points of access, and existing supports, and providing assistance (e.g. interpreters, information in multiple languages, outreach) for IRW navigating Canadian housing systems to aid them in finding affordable, secure short- and long-term housing.
- **Evaluate and improve provincial and federal housing policies** to support the safety of IRW leaving violence and abuse. This can be achieved through the creation,

implementation, and on-going review of the National Housing Strategy to improve affordability and availability of housing nation-wide,¹¹ as well as making housing more accessible to vulnerable populations such as IRW. Provincially, a review of BC Housing policies and processes is necessary to ensure they account for the needs of IRW leaving violence and abuse, as well as other vulnerable populations.

- **Support access to appropriate and secure short- and long-term housing** for IRW, which can be achieved through initiatives such as placing emphasis on accessible, *appropriate* housing in the development of policy and funding structures and building more affordable housing with improved access for IRW and their children.
- **Reduce barriers related to discrimination** against IRW in the housing sector and rental market by increasing awareness of the intersections between discrimination (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability) and access to housing to improve equitable access for IRW. Important developments include, but are not limited to: 1) improving tenants' rights and protections; 2) providing cultural safety training and education to housing managers, landlords, and service providers regarding the unique needs of vulnerable populations; and 3) reviewing and reforming existing laws and policies governing the rental market to ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations, including IRW, are considered and included.
- **Focus on and address the three key priorities** to improve IRW's safety through access to housing, which includes: 1) improving **supply** of housing through the development of more affordable rentals for low- and middle-income individuals and those with distinct needs, such as IRW; 2) **developing and supporting integration and collaboration** among housing partnerships, as well as between housing agencies and other community services; and 3) addressing the issue of **affordability of housing** through improving provincial housing funding frameworks to be flexible enough to incorporate IRW's needs.

Health: Key themes and recommendations

The health policy analysis provides a detailed discussion of the intersections between health, housing, and immigration, refugee, and settlement sectors. This analysis highlights considerations for both policy and practice within the health sector related to IRW's experiences as well as intersecting contexts of violence against women, migration, settlement,

¹¹ Following the release of the National Housing Strategy in November 2017, concerns were raised that the strategy may not have a meaningful impact on affordability and accessibility of housing in BC. This is due to the strategy's focus on home ownership and limited emphasis on support for non-profit and rental market housing. Accordingly, the issues of housing affordability and accessibility must remain at the forefront of advocacy and changes to policy and practice moving forward. The City of Vancouver's *Vision for a National Housing Strategy* report acknowledged that issues of unaffordable and inaccessible housing underlie long-term economic and social inequality in Vancouver, and efforts to structure and implement a provincial housing strategy need to be affordability-focused across housing spheres (e.g., non-profit housing, rental market housing, and home ownership).

housing, poverty and financial insecurity, and income and employment. These considerations draw attention to how physical and mental health and well-being, as well as access to health services underlie IRW's experiences while leaving violence and abuse, locating appropriate short- and long-term housing, and successfully integrating into Canadian society. Of note, the health analysis demonstrates the complex and intersecting nature of:


- 1) settlement and health outcomes; and
- 2) the linkages between health and housing.

The health analysis further focuses on issues of access to healthcare in light of current policies (e.g., the Interim Federal Health Program, Universal Healthcare) and practices (e.g., limitations related to access to interpretation and translation, lack of culturally safe health services and policies), which is contextualized within a broader human rights framework.

Key Health Recommendations

Through the above noted health policy analysis, primary policy barriers and issues were identified. Resulting from this analysis, the research team made several recommendations. The key health recommendations are to:

- **Increase health budgets** to reflect the health needs of immigrants and refugees in Canada generally, as well as IRW leaving violence and abuse more specifically.
- **Address language barriers** through prioritizing the translation of relevant information and privileging multilingual access, improving health literacy, and creating and promoting awareness of multilingual information and resources related to status and immigration-related concerns, including health care.
- **Increase access to health services** through the provision of emergency and essential health care services in BC to IRW without medical coverage (regardless of legal status), as well as expediting H&C applications for non-status women experiencing abuse to ensure these women have access to essential and emergency care.
- **Improve culturally safe and violence- and trauma-informed services, supports, and practices** through initiatives such as developing culturally safe health services across health authorities, increasing and supporting cultural safety training within the health sector, and prioritizing the development of violence- and trauma-informed health services and policies.
- **Shift the framework for health to that of a human rights approach** that emphasizes health as a fundamental right of immigrants and refugees, which would involve shifting



policies and practices to reflect IRW's health concerns as rights-based and providing more funding and support for health advocates.

Potential Barriers and Recommendations

Many barriers and recommendations emerged through the overall and sector-specific (i.e., immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, and health) policy analyses outlined in the sections above. A summary of these potential¹² barriers and recommendations is provided below, and the full discussion and detailed explanations are provided in the complete report, followed at the end of that report by Section 6 which sets out the barriers and recommendations in more contextual detail than in this summary below.

Overall and Intersecting Potential Barriers and Recommendations

Areas of Focus	Potential Barriers and Recommendations
<p>Awareness of, and Access to, Services and Resources</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information; • Lack of multilingual information; • Lack of support for navigating systems and resources; and • Lack of accessible knowledge mobilization. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link IRW with resources and create awareness of existing services and supports. • Raise awareness of available resources, supports, and services. • Provide information regarding and advocacy to support navigation of systems (e.g., legal, child protection, immigration, housing, health). • Provide information about violence against women and supports in multiple languages and in various mediums prior to and upon a woman’s arrival in Canada.
<p>Knowledge of Canadian Laws and Systems</p> <p>Legal Support</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information regarding, and support for, navigating Canadian systems; and • Lack of legal aid and legal support.

¹² “Potential” in the sense of having or showing the capacity to develop into barriers.

	<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to legal aid, legal information, and legal resources. • Provide additional support and funding for existing programs that aid IRW in navigating legal and immigration systems.
<p>Discrimination</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination; • Poverty; • Un/underemployment; and • Language. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and implement poverty reduction and prevention strategies for IRW and their families who are struggling to meet essential needs. • Shift approach to understanding poverty to include IRW’s lived experiences and related contexts, such as the interconnections between economic well-being and housing, health, and successful settlement. • Review income assistance rates and policies to ensure an increase to a livable income for IRW and their families. • Acknowledge foreign credentials of IRW to support them in securing financially and professionally rewarding and secure employment. • Require each regulated occupation to develop a single pan-Canadian standard. • Support settlement agencies to work in collaboration with employers. • Emphasize and account for the importance of language classes. • Provide opportunities for training and education for IRW. • Address language barriers in the provision of services through hiring multilingual staff, access to translators and providing information in multiple languages.

<p style="text-align: center;">Relationships that Affect Help-Seeking</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited supports; and • Lack of relationships that support help-seeking. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and utilize culturally informed means of reaching out to IRW. • Highlight and utilize primary points of access to reach IRW, such as settlement and health services. • Develop community relationships and utilize informal support networks for IRW, which will require communication, connection, collaboration, and coordination between formal agencies/programs (e.g., settlement, housing, health) and informal supports.
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration, Connection, Coordination, and Communication</p>	<p><i>Potential Barrier:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of cross-sectoral collaboration, connection, coordination, and communication. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance cross-sectoral support and collaboration across housing, health and immigration, refugee, and settlement sectors. • Improve coordination and collaboration between justice systems. • Consult with communities and foster relationships with agencies such as community-based immigrant and refugee services and informal community networks. • Address the siloed nature of the family and criminal legal systems.
<p style="text-align: center;">Policy Review</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current challenging policies in federal and provincial housing, immigration, refugee, and settlement, and health; and • Examining policy intent with policy outcomes.

	<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that flexible and responsive policies and regular policy reviews become an important part of organizational culture. • Create clearly defined and accessible policies, including transparency about eligibility and processes for IRW who are trying to navigate local and government systems.
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Immigration, Refugee, and Settlement Potential Barriers and Recommendations

Areas of Focus	Potential Barriers and Recommendations
Community and Community Integration	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited community integration; and • Limited and variations in community capacity. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize welcoming communities and community integration for IRW and children. • Focus on and support the building of community capacity in both rural and urban settings.
Federal and Provincial Regulations and Procedures	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal jurisdiction procedures for supports; • Provincial jurisdiction procedures for supports; • Challenging immigration applications for status (i.e., federal jurisdiction - IRCC); • Impacts of sponsorship laws and processes (i.e., federal jurisdiction). <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review IRCC policy intents and outcomes related to support for IRW and determine if the supports and assistance offered are sufficient. • Enable temporary resident permit holders access to the <i>Child Care Subsidy Act</i>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardize intake and accounting/reporting practices across Canada. • Streamline labour market integration for immigrants and refugees. • Address challenges related to immigration applications and processing, such as “fast tracking” IRW with experiences of abuse. • Improve the expedition of temporary work permits for IRW. • Review of sponsorship laws and process in cases when a woman is being abused by her sponsor.
<p style="text-align: center;">Discrimination</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination and gender bias in policies and processes; • Provision of training and hiring; and • Labour and employment. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address and minimize gender bias in immigration processes at the federal level. • Complete a gendered analysis of <i>The Balanced Refugee Reform Act (Bill C-11)</i> and <i>The Protection of Canada’s Immigration System Act (Bill C-31)</i>. • Conduct a gender and safety audit of all existing programs. • Streamline labour market integration for immigrants and refugees. • Expedite the application process for immigrants and refugees who are seeking employment.
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration, Connection, Coordination, and Communication</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coordination of responses for services and benefits. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination between the IRCC and other federal and provincial agencies/ministries is key to ensure that IRW and their children who are leaving violence and abuse

	<p>have access to services while awaiting the results of an Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds (H&C) application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow temporary resident stakeholders to access child subsidies under the <i>Child Care Subsidy Act</i>.
Legal and Procedural	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onus of burden of proof for IRW. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address issues related to burden of proof by shifting responsibility from IRW to IRCC and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) for establishing abuse in order to qualify for an exemption in cases of sponsorship.

Housing Sector Potential Barriers and Recommendations

Areas of Focus	Potential Barriers and Recommendations
Access to and Knowledge of Existing and Available Housing	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of information and knowledge about available housing; and • Lack of supports for navigating housing systems. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support IRW’s access to short- and long-term housing. • Improve access to affordable housing through increased housing stock. • Create and disseminate clear messages about housing availability and access through knowledge mobilization and multilingual awareness campaigns.
Supports for Obtaining Housing	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited supports for IRW to obtain housing; and • Limited cross-sectoral collaboration, connection, coordination, and communication.

	<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide assistance (e.g. knowledge mobilization, multilingual information, access to translators, outreach) to IRW to help them navigate Canadian systems, as well as find and secure affordable housing. • Forge relationships and foster collaboration cross-sectorally to support IRW/mothers and their children in obtaining short- and long-term housing.
<p>Federal and Provincial Jurisdiction and Procedure</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal and provincial housing policies which disadvantage IRW; and • Limited housing budgets which affect IRW’s ability to secure needed housing. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and on-going review of the Canadian National Housing Strategy (NHS) to improve affordability and availability of housing nation-wide, as well as making housing more accessible to vulnerable groups such as immigrant, refugee, and non-status women leaving violence and abuse. • Systematic review and subsequent reforms to the NHS to address recent critiques and concerns raised regarding the limited support for rental market and non-profit housing offered in the strategy. • Affordability-focused policy reform during the development and implementation of BC’s provincial housing strategy. • Development and implementation of the City of Vancouver’s own housing plan to address the challenges that are more pronounced in the Greater Vancouver Area, such as high cost of rentals and insufficient rental availability. • Review BC Housing policies and amend current housing regulations to allow for flexibility in policies that better reflect the realities and lived experiences of IRW leaving violence and abuse. This IRW-focused review should

	<p>include, but not be limited to: (1) assessing BC Housing’s implementation of the National Occupancy Standards; (2) increasing flexibility around the number of children allowed per unit or bedroom within non-profit housing, co-ops, and public units; (3) improving the accessibility of BC Housing’s website and online application process (e.g., language, ease of access); (4) examining and improving the housing registry application process to ensure it meets the unique needs of IRW and their children; and (5) ensuring housing access and eligibility for non- and precarious status women (e.g., during/after the breakdown of a sponsorship arrangement).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve housing budgets for immigrants and refugees at the policy-level. This can be accomplished through increased funding overall and more specific funding allocation within existing housing budgets for vulnerable populations, including immigrants and refugees.¹³ • The needs of vulnerable populations must be a focus in the review and reform of all provincial tenancy laws. For example, during the upcoming review of provincial tenancy laws led by the Rental Housing Task Force under BC’s NDP government, the unique needs and realities of IRW and their children must be considered and addressed through the stakeholder consultations and subsequent affordability-based recommendations and reforms.
<p>Discrimination</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination in access to housing for IRW; • Limited access to appropriate and secure housing; • Racism as it affects access to both market and non-profit housing for IRW; • Discriminatory treatment of tenants; and • Bias in the rental market.

¹³ Of note, the BC NDP’s 2018 budget includes funding for housing for populations who are at an increased risk of homelessness, including women and children leaving violence and abuse. As Robinson (2018) explained, “included in the budget was about \$565 million for new units of housing and homes for those facing homelessness and for women and children feeling domestic abuse. The spending on housing for women and children was touted by the government as the first significant investment of its kind in the last two decades” (para. 5). For more information see: <http://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/b-c-budget-2018-1-6-billion-allocated-for-housing-but-no-rebate-for-renters>.

	<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize both accessible and appropriate housing in the development of policy and funding structures. • Build more affordable housing and improve access to safe, adequate, and stable housing for IRW and children. • Improve and increase accessibility in the community housing sector to reduce health risks related to poor quality housing. • Increase awareness of racism and discrimination and its impacts on access to housing for IRW and children.¹⁴ • Improve tenants’ rights and protections, as well as accessibility of such knowledge for immigrant and refugee populations. This can be accomplished through initiatives such as increasing awareness of existing rights and protections within provincial tenancy agreements, improving enforcement powers within the Residential Tenancy Board, and determining what needs to be changed within the Residential Tenancy Agreement to appropriately address discrimination against vulnerable populations such as IRW and their children (e.g., removing the fixed term tenancy loophole¹⁵).¹⁶ • Provide cultural safety training and education about the dynamics and impacts of abuse to housing managers, landlords, and other service providers supporting IRW. • Prioritize education of landlords and housing managers regarding the unique needs and circumstances of vulnerable populations, as well as rights-based education and awareness raising within immigrant and refugee communities. • Ensure that advocates provide support for IRW in navigating housing systems, dealing with issues that arise within the housing systems, and locating and securing both short- and long-term housing.
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¹⁴ The recently authorized reestablishment of the BC Human Rights Commission should assist in this regard.

¹⁵ British Columbia’s *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) was revised in late 2017 to address the fixed term tenancy loophole and vacate clauses. Effective December 11, 2017, the RTA now reads “... a tenancy agreement may only include a requirement that the tenant vacate the rental unit at the end of a fixed term if: the tenancy agreement is a sublease agreement; or the tenancy is a fixed term tenancy in circumstances prescribed in section 13.1 of the Residential Tenancy Regulation.” While the fixed term tenancy loophole has not been fully removed from the RTA, the revisions limit the ambiguity within this legislative framework. For more information see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies/ending-a-tenancy/tenant-notice>

¹⁶ More enforcement powers were granted to the Residential Tenancy Board in the last provincial budget, which will allow for the continued review and enforcement of the *Residential Tenancy Act* provincially.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift the approach for supporting IRW in the rental market through supporting housing memberships (e.g., co-op models), developing strategies that are appropriate for each location (e.g., urban versus rural), and increasing and improving affordable home ownership programs (e.g., availability, eligibility, cost, shared equity models of home ownership). • Review and reform existing laws and policies governing discrimination in the rental market to ensure that the needs of vulnerable populations, such as IRW, are considered.
<p>Housing-Specific Challenges</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited priority of housing for IRW. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine existing research to understand how Housing First models could be adapted and implemented in a culturally safe manner that addresses the housing needs of IRW, as well as conduct any necessary further future research on the appropriate design and implementation of culturally safe Housing First models. • Once understood, make the appropriate adjustments to Federal Housing Partnering Strategy (HPS) program to ensure that the needs of IRW leaving violence are being met. • Create affordable housing supply across the housing continuum to ensure an adequate supply for meeting the needs of IRW leaving violence.
<p>Institutional-level Considerations</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional and systemic. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that housing supports, services, and programs are culturally safe, informed, and appropriate.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide cultural safety training to housing managers and landlords at the operational level, as well as to government administrators at the institutional level. • Raise awareness about the supports and services available to IRW leaving violence and abuse. • Implement and enforce policies to eliminate institutional racism that create barriers to housing access for IRW and children. • Provide training on the dynamics and impacts of violence, especially within immigrant and refugee communities, to housing managers and landlords.
Development	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges of current short- and long-term housing models. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support short-term, crisis, and transitional housing. • Place emphasis on IRW's ability to connect with, secure, and retain long-term safe and affordable housing.

Health Sector Potential Barriers and Recommendations

Areas of Focus	Potential Barriers and Recommendations
Federal and Provincial Government	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current challenging policies, programs, and budgets. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase health budgets to reflect the health needs of immigrants and refugees in Canada.
Discrimination	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional racism; • Language barriers; and • Lack of medical coverage and/or access to emergency care.

	<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize the development and implementation of policies to reduce racism and promote cultural safety. • Implement and enforce policies to eliminate institutional racism. • Prioritize the multilingual translation of relevant information and improve health literacy and accessibility of information about health services. • Create and promote awareness of multilingual information and resources related to status and immigration-related concerns, including health care. • Support collaboration between BC health ministries, health authorities, hospitals, clinics, health care professionals, universities, and the Provincial Language Service. • Ensure that the Provincial Health Authority continue to dedicate resources to interpretation services and multilingual supports. • Increase access to health services for non-status women and their children. • Ensure that ministries overseeing health programs enact policies of transparency with regard to discretionary approvals for services • Expedite H&C applications for non-status women with experiences of abuse to ensure they have access to essential and emergency health and dental care.
<p>Practice and Procedure</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of culturally safe supports and services; and • Lack of violence- and trauma-informed practices. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement culturally safe health services and policies across health authorities. • Increase public and health provider awareness of racism and discrimination and its impacts on access to health services. • Increase and support cultural safety training within the health sector.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize the development of violence- and trauma-informed health services and policies.
<p>Collaboration, Connection, Coordination, and Communication</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coordination between IRW servicing agencies, government, and other sectors. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and support coordination, connection, communication, and collaboration to provide essential health care to non-status women. • Foster collaboration among health ministries, the police, provincial justice ministries, IRCC, housing ministries, and income and employment ministries to improve health outcomes for IRW.
<p>Development</p>	<p><i>Potential Barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current framework for understanding “health;” and • The need for a rights-based health framework for IRW. <p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that physical health, while important, not be the sole focus when addressing IRW’s health needs, and make mental health services and supports accessible for IRW. • Shift policies and practices to reflect IRW’s health concerns as rights-based. • In-line with a rights-based framework, provide more funding and support for health advocates for IRW.

Note on Policy Brief Summary Methodology


After developing the base for this research and guiding research questions, the research team outlined interrelated and often intersecting information on policies dealing with immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, and health, with additional considerations such as labour/financial assistance and child protection. These considerations informed and guided the research team's approach to the two primary Phase III objectives. Additionally, in the present examination of relevant policies, as earlier mentioned, the overarching policy intents considered were *to secure IRW's safety and well-being*. This particular approach to the analysis through the housing-centric policy lens sees accessing safe short- and long-term housing as key to that intent, as it may be relevant to the safety and security of IRW leaving violence and abuse.¹⁷ These overarching policy intents guided the examination of the policies relevant to the safety and security of IRW leaving violence and abuse in the contexts of housing, and subsequently immigration, refugee, and settlement, and health.

The sources of information that informed the Phase III policy analysis and report are:

- 1) The Building Supports Project Phase I research findings, which were based on surveys and interviews with service providers and IRW with lived experiences with abuse;
- 2) The Advisory Committees' Phase I workshop and workshop summary;
- 3) The Ending Violence Association of BC's *Immigrant Women's Project* (2012) report;
- 4) A systematic literature review, which included over 150 relevant policies, government reports, sector reports (e.g., as emerged from immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, and health sectors), and peer-reviewed journal articles;
- 5) Interviews with 14 key stakeholders who are individuals with working knowledge as an administrator in the policies of one of the sectors (i.e., immigration, refugee, and settlement, housing, and health);
- 6) A one-day in-person workshop with the Advisory Committee members;
- 7) An examination of relevant laws which impact non-status refugee women (see Ardanaz, 2017); and,

Early feedback on the policy analysis and frame was obtained from the British Columbia Inter-Ministerial Committee on Domestic Violence (BC IMCDV) from an in-person meeting in Victoria, followed most

¹⁷ The *Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) Policy and Charter of Rights and Freedoms Section 15* (i.e., Equality) served as the overarching policy intents against which to examine policies relevant for inclusion in the development of the Phase III policy analysis. These overarching policy intents guided the examination of the policies relevant to the safety and security of IRW leaving violence



recently by subsequent feedback on the draft report and policy brief summary (PBS) from individual BC IMCDV members and other relevant key stakeholders. These individuals reviewed subsections of relevance to their own areas of expertise and experience, as well as the overall PBS.