



Policy Paper: Housing Crisis Among Multicultural Communities in Queensland has Become a Wicked Problem that Requires a Holistic Approach

What's the problem?

Safe and appropriate housing is vital for a successful settlement and integration of migrants and refugees in Australia. Establishing a home is a critical part of the process of re-gaining a sense of ontological security and a life with dignity (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Such state is not easy to achieve for migrants and refugees who, on top of the hardships and trauma many of them must endure as a part of their migration journeys, they are also vulnerable to housing stress, insecurity and homelessness upon arrival in Australia (Flatau et al. 2015). This is because finding a rental property is always a struggle for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and it is particularly hard for those on temporary visas – even for places they can afford, their status becomes a huge barrier because they have a limited number of identity documents to support their applications (ABC, 2021). Besides, the most vulnerable migrant cohorts such as humanitarian entrants have a far greater likelihood of moving multiple times in the early years of settlement, and they are far less likely to buy their own homes compared to other migrant groups (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013).

The challenges faced by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as they attempt to secure a place to call home is not a new phenomenon in Australia.

Decades ago, Paul Foley and Andrew Beer (2003) raised alarm as they demonstrated numerous obstacles that new migrants and refugees encountered in their search for affordable and appropriate housing, which progressively placed them at a high risk of becoming homeless. The key factors outlined as impeding refugees and migrants' access to proper housing at the time were financial barriers – low income levels; inability to accrue bonds, rent in advance and utility deposits; discrimination by real estate agents and landlords on the grounds of race, gender, age and social status; cultural barriers, especially for large and female headed families, lack of suitable housing options, and the lack of familiarity with Australian housing and legal systems. Unfortunately for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, these obstacles persist today (FECCA, 2023).

Discriminatory practices against newly arrived migrants are further enhanced by their limited understanding of tenants' rights and responsibilities, poor English language skills, limited computer skills and low levels of literacy, lack of rental and employment histories, their appearances and religion. That's why it is not surprising 35% of refugees and migrants in Australia experience discrimination while applying for a rental property.



They also face the so called 'agent-prejudice' where a real estate agent has a personal bias against a particular ethnic minority and is therefore unwilling to even assess their applications. On top this comes 'customer-prejudice' where a rental agent discriminates against minority groups because they want to protect their business from customers they perceive to be prejudiced by the mainstream community (Ziersch, Loehr & Miller, 2023). That's why, the 'smelly migrant' is the most subversive of all migrants in Australia. The society generally denigrates the foods of the migrants, asylum seekers and refugees as stinky, and the fear of the 'other' is sometimes expressed as odour-based slurs (Fukui, 2017), becoming a basis for the real estate to refuse placing refugees and migrants in some neighbourhoods. Limited housing options and opportunities available to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants put them at high risk of homelessness.



Lived Experiences

The literature above aligns with points constantly made by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who graphically explain frustrations and stress caused by segregationist and discriminatory practices in in the private rental market, as demonstrated below by a man from Sudan who believes the real estate agents kept lying to him that the houses he applied for had been taken by others, as he puts it:

“They are available for renting, but this town is having the first migrant experience, and they don’t want to rent to new arrivals. You go to the real estate agent and say look I am very interested in putting an application for this house. And in couple of hours, they will call and say it is gone that someone else came. And in a week, we still see that the place is available”
— Sudanese man (Cited in FECCA 2023).

The same points were made by a Congolese refugee who also, every time their family applied for a rental property, they were rejected. He claims:

“Every time we were putting an application for the house that we can afford the rent for; we keep receiving a rejection letter saying that the house was not available anymore. And after two weeks if you look on the internet the house is still on the market available for renting. So, the question is what kind of people are they looking for? They say no because you are not working, you are new to Australia, they are asking for references. I am not working but I am always paying my rent on time with the money that I get from Centrelink” — Congolese man (Cited in FECCA 2023).



These experiences explain why so many migrants and refugees end up becoming homeless, as it was the case of Rose* who in her interview with ABC in 2021, she claimed that she became homeless when she failed to secure a rental property for herself and her child, as she puts it:

'I didn't have any place to go ... I searched for different properties, even sharing a house. They didn't accept me'.

After piling her belongings into a friend's garage, Rose further explains, like many other new migrants and refugees, she ran out of options. She and her six-month-old son started sleeping in a park (ABC, 2021). Rose's story is not unique. The recent literature (Blackford, Crawford, McCausland & Zhao, 2023) indicates that the marginalised migrants and refugees who do not sleep rough live in insecure and/poor housing situations, including overcrowding that has, historically led to poor quality of life within this cohort.

*Name altered for privacy reasons.



What's the ask?

- We are asking the Queensland Government to work more closely with the real estate industry stakeholders, refugee, asylum seeker and migrant settlement providers, and community representatives to co-design and co-develop a fair and equitable rental framework and standards that address discriminatory practices in the private rental markets across the state.
- We further ask the Queensland Government to work with ECCQ, as a peak body, to foster collaborations between communities, settlement services providers, and real estate agents to co-design clear comprehensive culturally appropriate and in-language education campaigns to ensure people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds understand their rights and responsibilities.
- ECCQ, as part of our state-wide first Queensland Executive Multicultural Service Sector Network, with executive representatives from 32 multicultural service providers across the state, welcomes the opportunity to work with the Queensland Government for the betterment of multicultural Queensland communities.



Reference List

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