

At Risk in the Suburbs? Immigrants' Housing Needs and Challenges in York Region

Valerie Preston, Robert Murdie, Min Jung Kwak, Ann Marie Murnaghan, Silvia D'Addario, Jennifer Logan, Uzo Anucha, York University; Sandeep Agrawal, Ryerson University; and Jane Wedlock, York Region Alliance to End Homelessness

Research funded by Homelessness Partnering Strategy, HRSDC, CIC, and York University with support from CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre and the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness

The Project

- **Explore the social backgrounds and housing experiences of immigrant households that are vulnerable to and at risk of homelessness in outer suburbs by:**
 - **Synthesis of policy and planning documents**
 - **Analysis of census information**
 - **Interviews with key actors**
 - **Focus groups with immigrants**

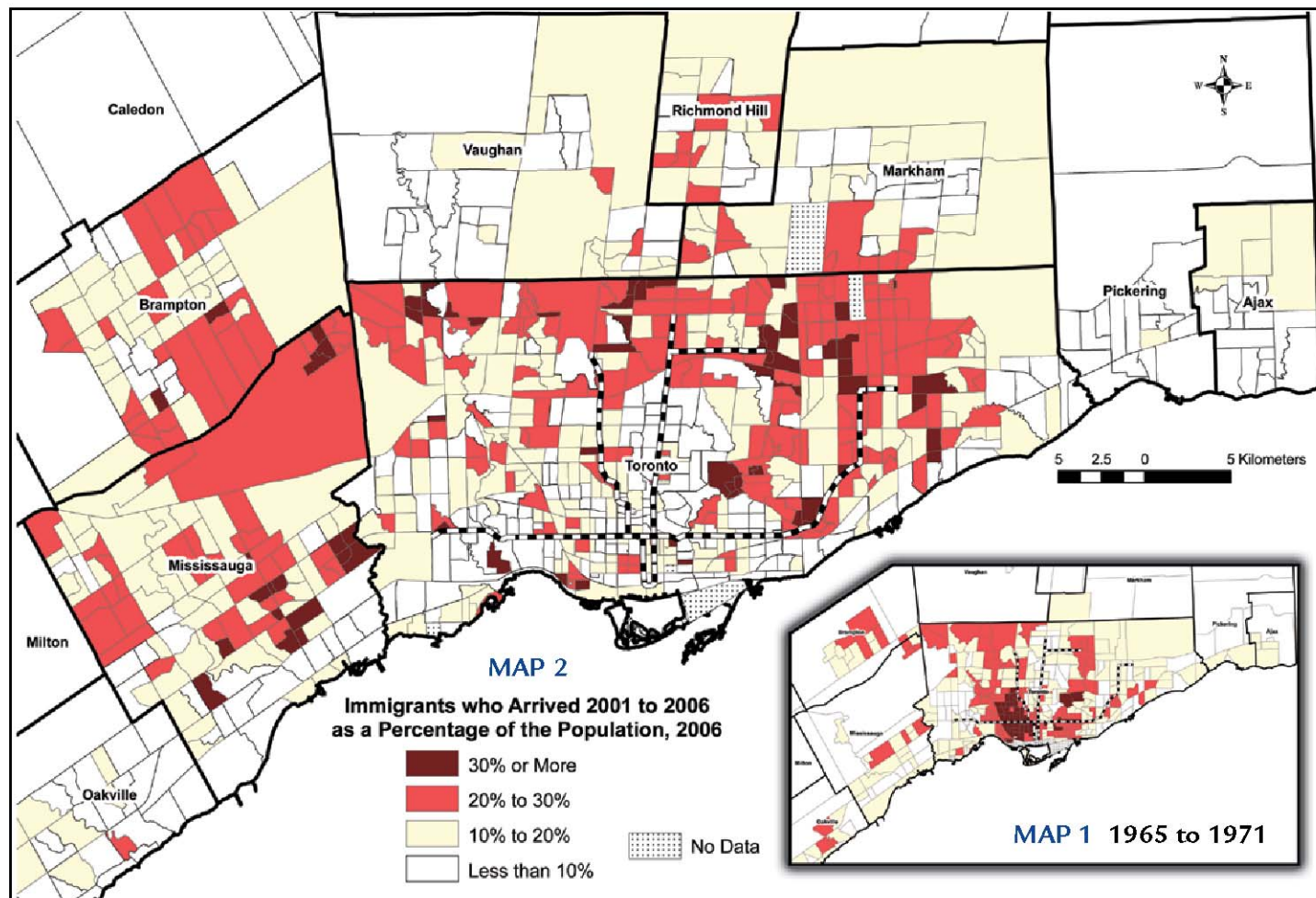
Why Study Immigrants' Housing in the Suburbs?

- **Increased concentration of immigrants in the suburbs**
- **Lack of affordable housing in the (outer) suburbs**
- **Few immigrant service providers in the (outer) suburbs**
- **Relatively little research about immigrant housing experiences in the (outer) suburbs**

Increased Concentration of Immigrants in Toronto's Suburbs

- **Earlier arrivals have relocated to the suburbs**
- **The majority of newcomers settle directly in the suburbs**
- **Ethnic background and socio-economic status of suburban newcomers is extremely diverse**

MAP 1 (inset) Immigrant Arrivals in the Toronto CMA, 1965 to 1971 as a percentage of the population, 1971
MAP 2 (large) Immigrant Arrivals in the Toronto CMA, 2001 to 2006 as a percentage of the population, 2006

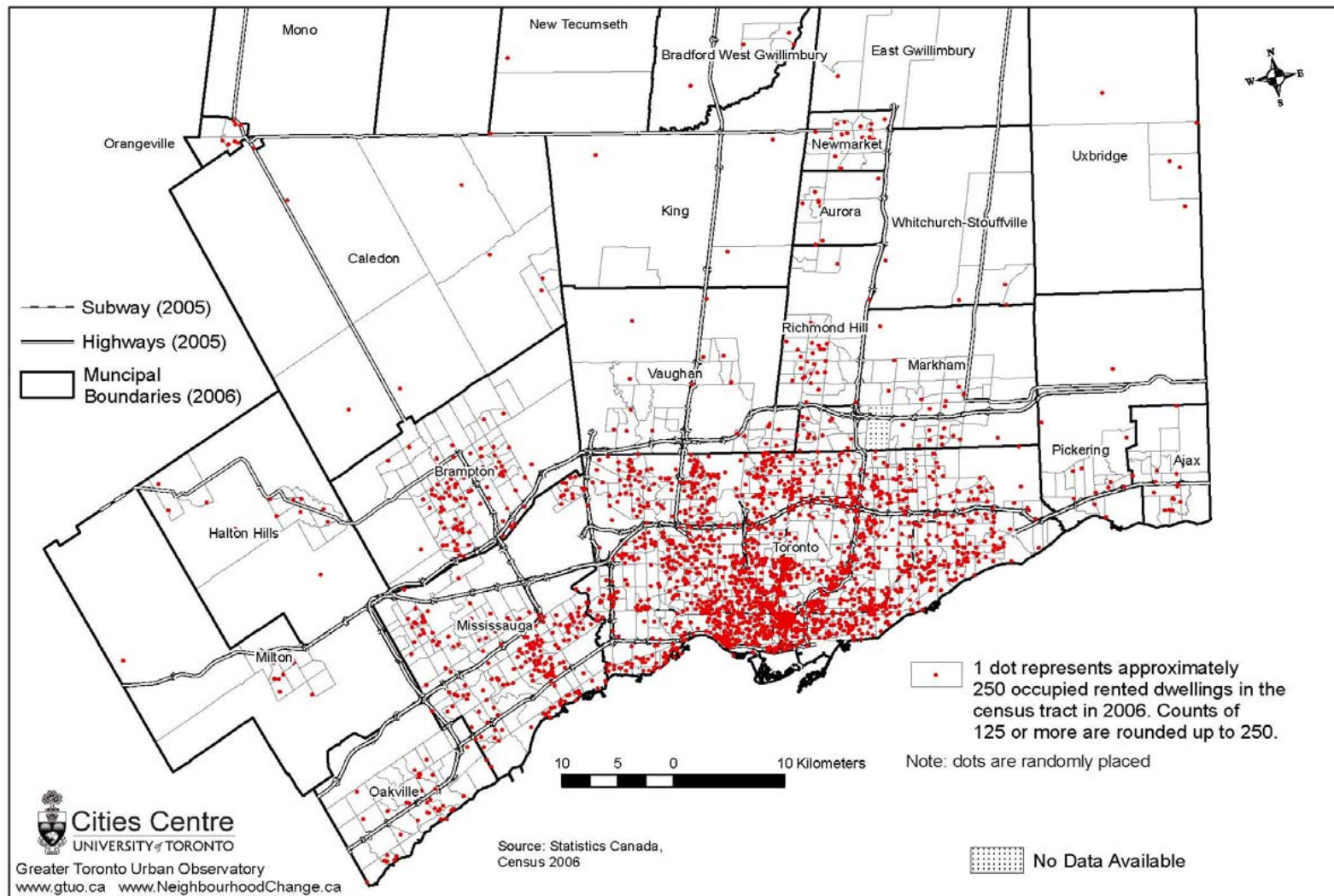


Lack of Affordable Housing in the Outer Suburbs

- **Mostly single family, detached, owner-occupied housing**
- **Limited rental opportunities**
- **Housing is expensive**
- **Therefore, many newcomers will likely have difficulty locating affordable housing in Toronto's (outer) suburbs**

Rented Dwelling Density, Toronto CMA 2006

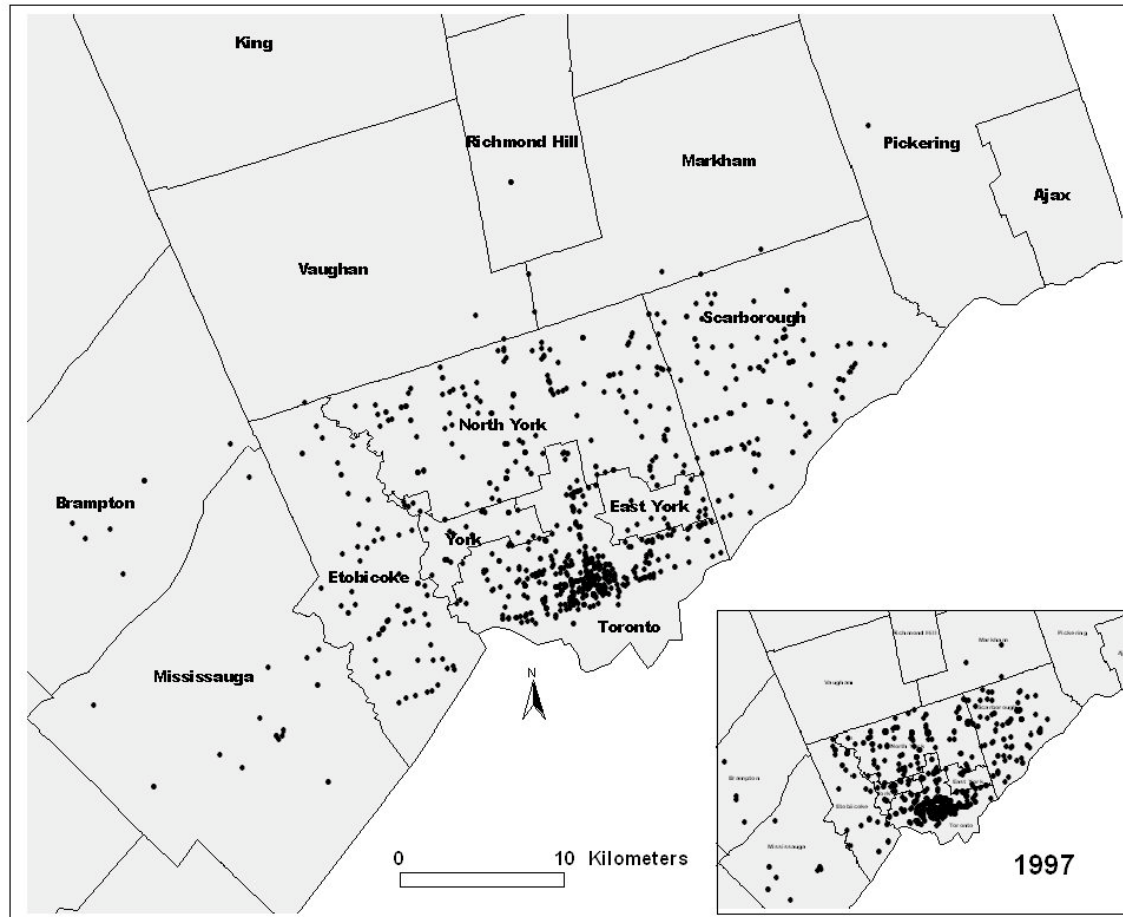
Census Tracts



Few Immigrant Service Providers in the Outer Suburbs

- **Over 95% of GTA immigrant service providers are located in the City of Toronto. About 37% offer housing services (Lo *et al*, 2007, CERIS WP 59)**
- **Result is a spatial mismatch between service provision and the location of new immigrants**

Figure 4: Distribution of ISPs in 1997 and 2002



Source: Toronto Blue Books 1997, 2002; Lim et al. 2005.

Evidence from the Literature

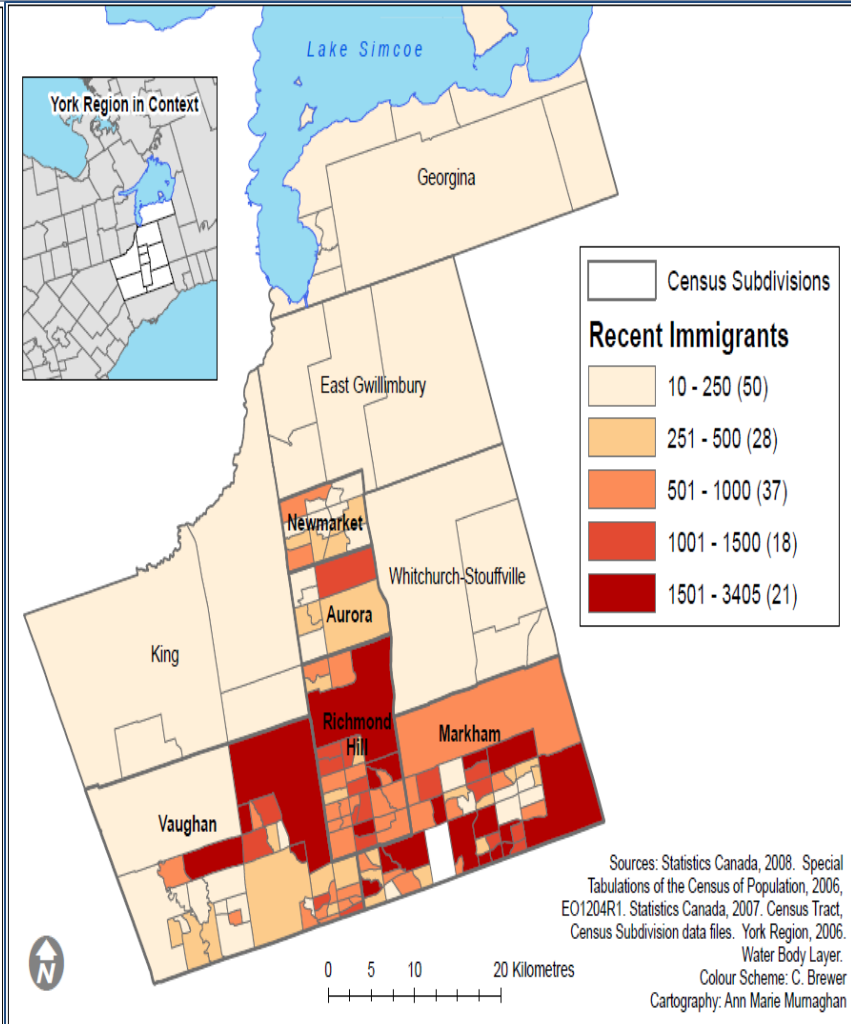
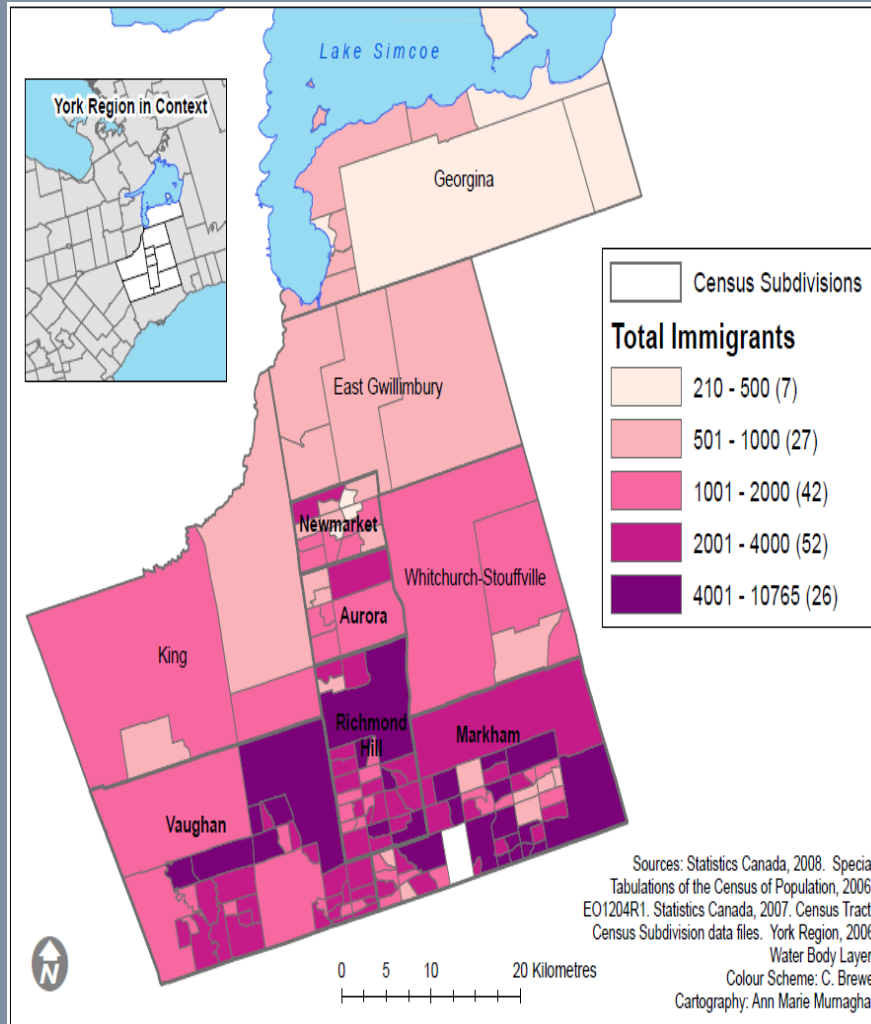
- **Canadian literature about immigrants' housing needs and experiences has expanded dramatically**
- **Housing affordability is the major problem**
- **But, there has been relatively little research on the housing experiences of immigrants in Canada's suburbs**

York Region Context

Archetype of Outer Suburb

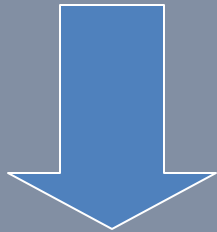
- **Rapid Population Growth**
- **Growing gap between those with means and those without**
- **Limited supply of affordable housing**
- **High Housing Costs**

Immigrants in York Region



Affordable Housing for Immigrants

- **Large household size**
- **Low household income**
- **High housing costs**



- **Financial difficulties: spend more than 30% of income on housing**
- **At risk of homelessness: spend more than 50% of income on housing**

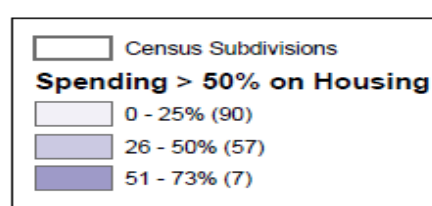
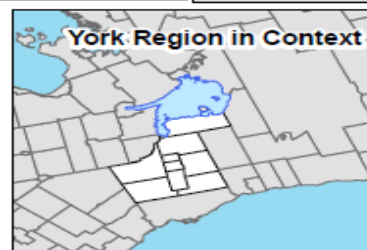
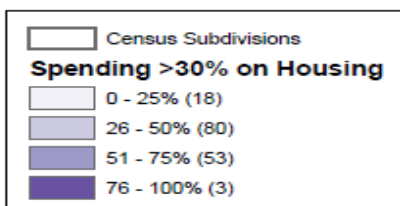
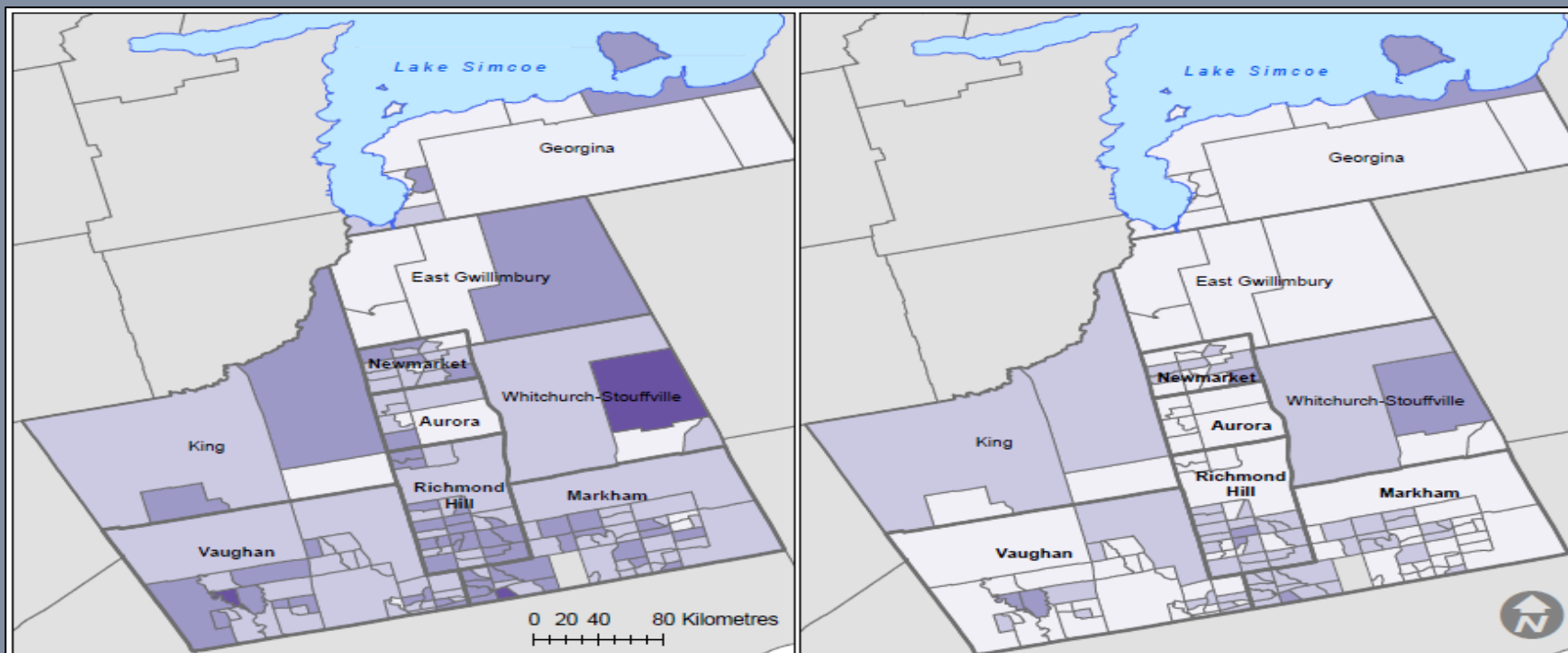
Immigrant Households, 2006

York Region, 2006

	Total population		All Immigrants	
	N	%	N	%
Owners	809,715	91.3	351,035	92.3
Renters	76,845	8.7	29,340	7.7
Spending greater than 30% on housing	232,270	26.2	122,585	32.2
Spending greater than 50% on housing	106,065	12.0	59,760	15.7

Source: Statistics Canada, 2008. Special Tabulations of 2006 Census of Population, EO1204R1

Recent Immigrants and Affordability



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2008. Special Tabulations of the Census of Population, 2006, EO1204R1. Statistics Canada, 2007. Census Tract, Census Subdivision data files. York Region, 2006. Water Body Layer. Colour Scheme: C. Brewer, Cartography: Ann Marie Murnaghan

Voices of Service Providers and Immigrants

- **Key informants**

- 13 from housing, social , and settlement service sectors

- **Focus groups**

- 7 immigrant communities
- Iranian, Arabic-speaking, Korean, South Asian, Filipina, Hong Kong Chinese, Russian
- More than 60 people

Major Themes

- ◉ **Variable housing experiences**
- ◉ **Housing barriers**
 - **Shortage of affordable housing**
 - **Shortage of social services**
 - **Discrimination**

Affordability, Low Income and Overcrowding

- **Our current place is newly built, there is no asphalt, and there are no parks or services at all. There is nothing we can do right now, we have to live there. In the summer it is possible to handle a mortgage but in the winter it is harder because there is less work and there is not enough money. (Iranian FG)**
- **If we could afford it we would move into a bigger house and something closer to the city. It is only a 2 bedroom house with 4 people living in it, it is very small and we are limited for space. My daughter is 25 and my son is 18. (Iranian FG)**

Landlord/Tenant Relations

- **They are just manipulating them and saying, “Oh well although it says \$600 on the front per month, we’re going to make you pay \$800, for whatever reason.” And you can’t really argue because quite frankly, you don’t have anywhere else to go. (South Asian FG)**
- **We had to pay for 6 months in advance because we had no guarantor. So that means biggest part of money we brought from outside we had to spend. (Russian FG)**

Discrimination

- Sometimes they don't give you because you are Iraqi, or Indian, I know they do this. And the other problem, you see, most of the immigrants have kids, at least two. So when they see that those people have kids, they refuse. Because my brother also, he found so many places but they say, "Oh you have five [children]? No, we want four." (Arabic-speaking FG)

Conclusions

- ◉ **Housing challenges in the suburbs:**
 - Largely due to immigrants' low incomes
 - Exacerbated by shortage of affordable housing, lack of services in suburbs, and household size
 - More pronounced for women, seniors, and certain classes of immigrants
- ◉ **Does homeownership indicate success?**

Recommendations

- **Legalize secondary suites**
- **Provide more housing information, prior to arrival**
- **Expand housing supports for immigrants**
- **Expand shelters and transitional housing**
- **National housing strategy to expand supply of affordable housing**

Our Thanks

- **Newcomers who participated in focus groups**
- **Our community partners from across York Region, particularly those who served on the advisory committee and helped organize the focus groups**
- **York Region Alliance to End Homelessness and all of its members**
- **York University**