Critical research agendas within the Metropolis Project:

Reflections on a study of precarious housing and hidden homelessness among refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver

Damaris Rose

Professor, Urban Studies

Université INRS, Centre – Urbanisation Culture Société

Coordinator, Housing & Neighbourhoods domain

Centre Métropolis du Québec – Immigration et Métropoles

Introduction to the study

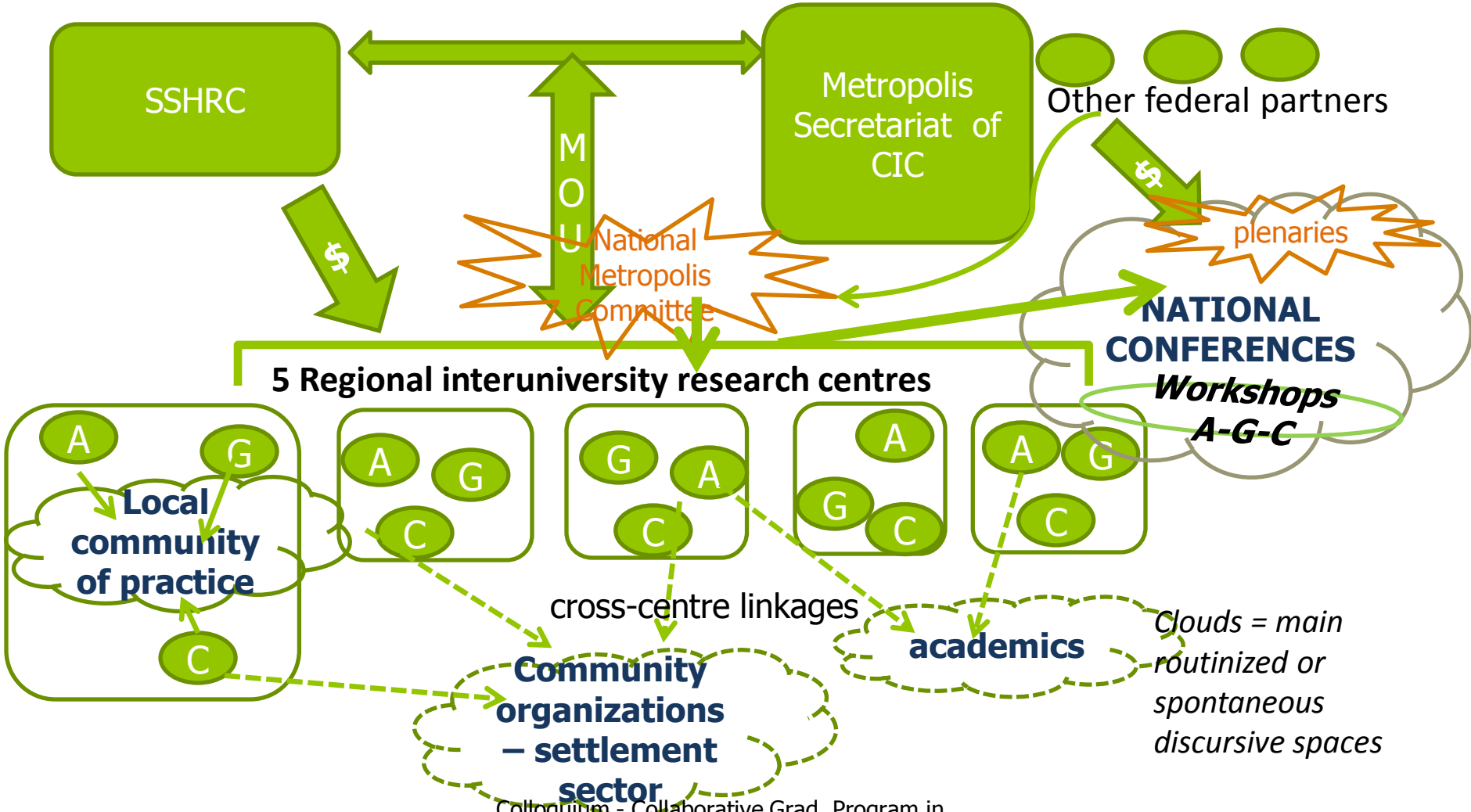
- *Precarious Housing and Hidden Homelessness among Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver*
- Team leader: D. Hiebert, UBC; co-researchers: V. Preston & R. Murdie (York), D. Rose (INRS)
- Funded (Sept. 2010-May 2011) under National Metropolis proposal call based on strategic partnership between the Homelessness Partnerships Strategy (HRSDC) and the Metropolis Secretariat (CIC) for a "Comparative study of housing and homelessness among refugees in MTV"
  - Outputs to date: published research reports & summaries for each city (all are here http://mbc.metropolis.net/media.html); presentations (community, government, academic); media releases

Metropolis Project context

Study was made possible by and reflects unique qualities of the Metropolis Project experiment:

- Space for negotiating between "policy relevance" and respect for researcher autonomy to reframe questions, define policy problems differently
- Communities of practice built-up over time
  - Trust-building at local scale between academic researchers, settlement services sector and government stakeholders → feasibility of partner collaboration in compressed time-frame, access to refugee claimants awaiting decision
  - Inter-provincial networking within NGO sector → support for MTV comparative aspect

Metropolis Project, 1996-2012 – organization and discursive spaces



Parameters and hypotheses underlying proposal call (based on existing literature)

- Affordable, decent housing as anchor point for a new start
  - Practical and symbolic aspects
- whereas precarious housing and homelessness are barriers to social and economic integration
- Both refugees (pre-selected) and refugee claimants at greater housing risk than other admission categories
  - Uprootedness, lack of family and/or co-ethnic support networks
  - Extreme economic precariousness: no savings, reliance on social assistance
- But need for comparison of respective housing experiences of refugees and claimants (in main gateway cities)

Revisiting Renaud's "One's bad [GARs] and the other one's worse [refugee claimants]" hypothesis

Does this finding (JIMI 2003) regarding employment and earnings also apply to housing?

- Since IRPA 2002, admission of more GARs with "multiple barriers" (protracted displacee existence, language, education…)
- **but GARs admitted as "future citizens" whereas claimants are temporary residents** (e.g. TFW work permit)
  - GARs: enhanced federally-funded settlement services in year 1, refugee claimants: excluded from federal asistance (except basic info about housing)
- Especially high housing vulnerability of refugee claimants who are alone (D'Addario et al. 2007; Murdie 2008)
- Worsening stigmatization of refugee claimants (political/media discourses of de-legitimation of inland claim-making)?

Re-contextualizing the RFP objectives

Our proposal argued for:

- Need to avoid danger of de-contextualization and overemphasis on immigration status - Despite RFP focus on refugees and asylum seekers only, the comparison should also extend to non-refugee immigrants, especially in view of
  - well-documented deterioration in labour market integration of economic immigrants
  - Worsening housing affordability and housing quality problems for low-income households in MTV over past decade
- Relevance of comparisons between MTV because of housing market and other difference in context of newcomer settlement

Study methodology: questionnaire survey & focus groups

- Focus groups with key informants in community-based organizations assisting newcomers (with aid of state funding)
- Questionnaire survey & focus groups with newcomers and recent immigrants (3mths-10yrs in Canada) drawn from clients using settlement agency services in 3-4 wk period: 200 questionnaires / city
  - 25% refugee claimants/landed-in-Canada refugees
    25% GAR/PSR
    50% non-refugee immigrants
- Follow-up focus groups with refugee claimants/LCRs and GARs
- Agency workers trained for the questionnaire survey
- Local research advisory committee of community partners (finalizing research instruments, debating recommendations…)

Methodological limits and challenges (1)

- Sampling universe excludes extremes i.e. those not needing settlement services + those too excluded to access them
  - Bias/limitation in terms of lack of generalizability to non-clients
  - But advantage in terms of focus on circumstances and needs of those already using settlement services (better comparability)

Methodological limits and challenges (2)

- Common research protocol versus local circumstances
  - Standardized questionnaire versus differences in housing typology, market, social housing policy
  - Between-city differences in organization and funding of settlement services (e.g. key Toronto organization, Housing Help has no equivalent in Mtl or Van.)
  - Balancing desire for consistency of sampling universe across cities with partner organizations' desire to buy-in to study
- Training community interviewers and doing survey in very tight timeframe

THE MONTRÉAL COMPONENT: CONTEXT, SELECTED FINDINGS

"Housing vulnerability": a view from census data

% renters spending ≥50% of income on housing, Montréal CMA, 2006:

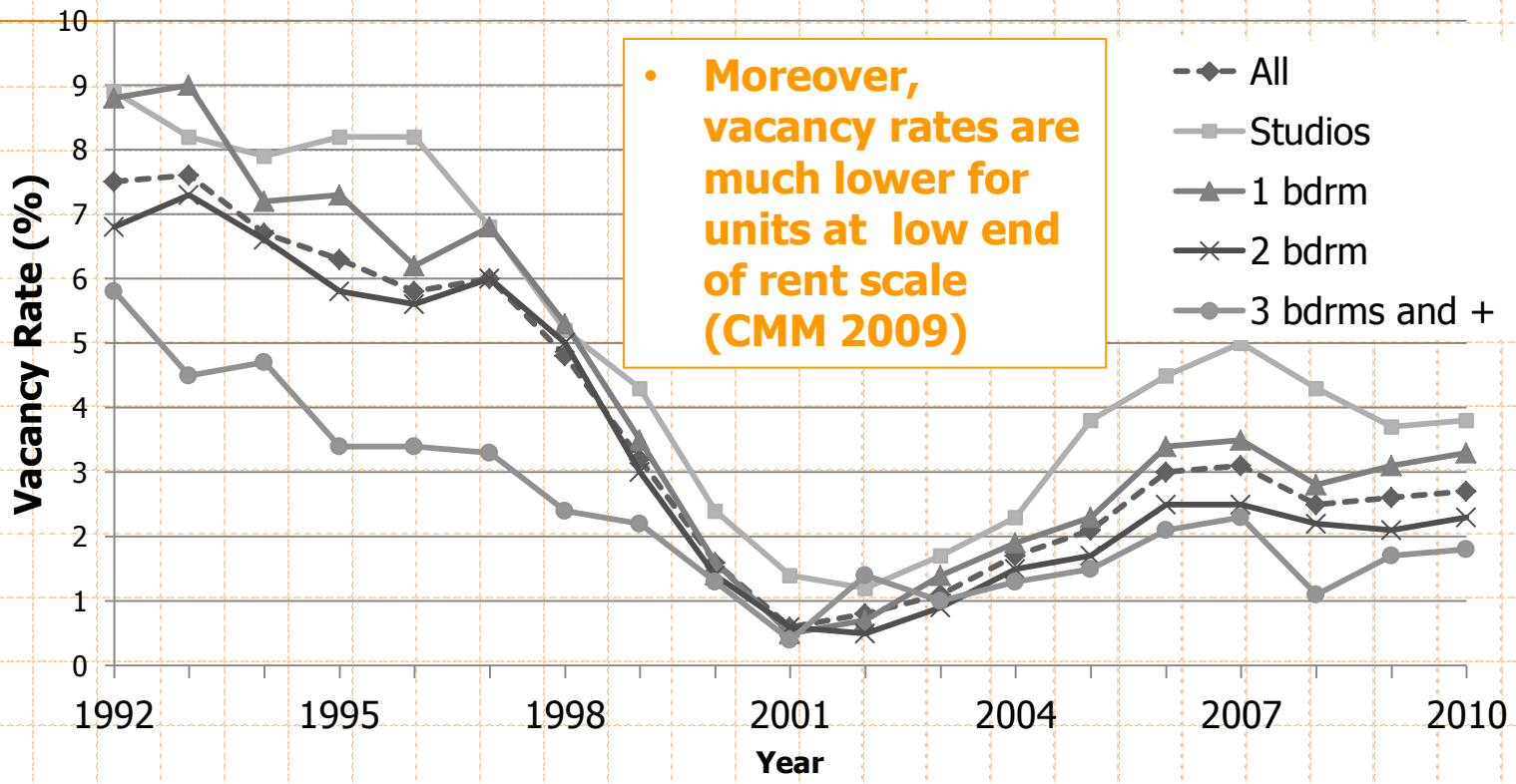
- Renter households in general: 18%
- Recent immigrants (2001-'06): 30%
- Non-permanent residents: 43%

- putting them at risk of homelessness, or cutting back on other essential needs

- Similar situation in Toronto & Vancouver

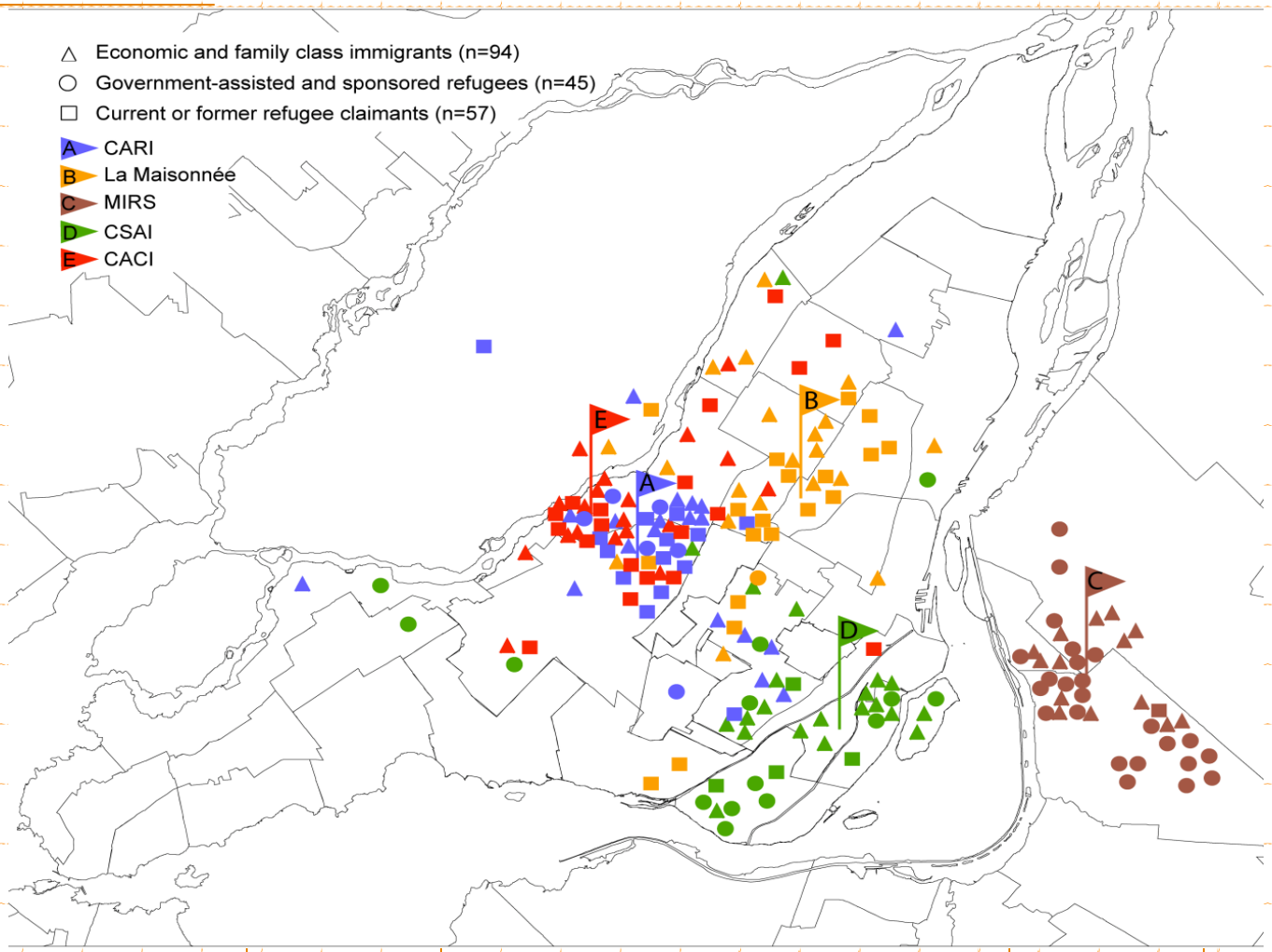
Source: Statistics Canada, "core data" compilations for Metropolis project researchers (Rose et al., 2012, forthcoming)

Housing supply context Vacancy rates, Island of Montréal, 1992-2010

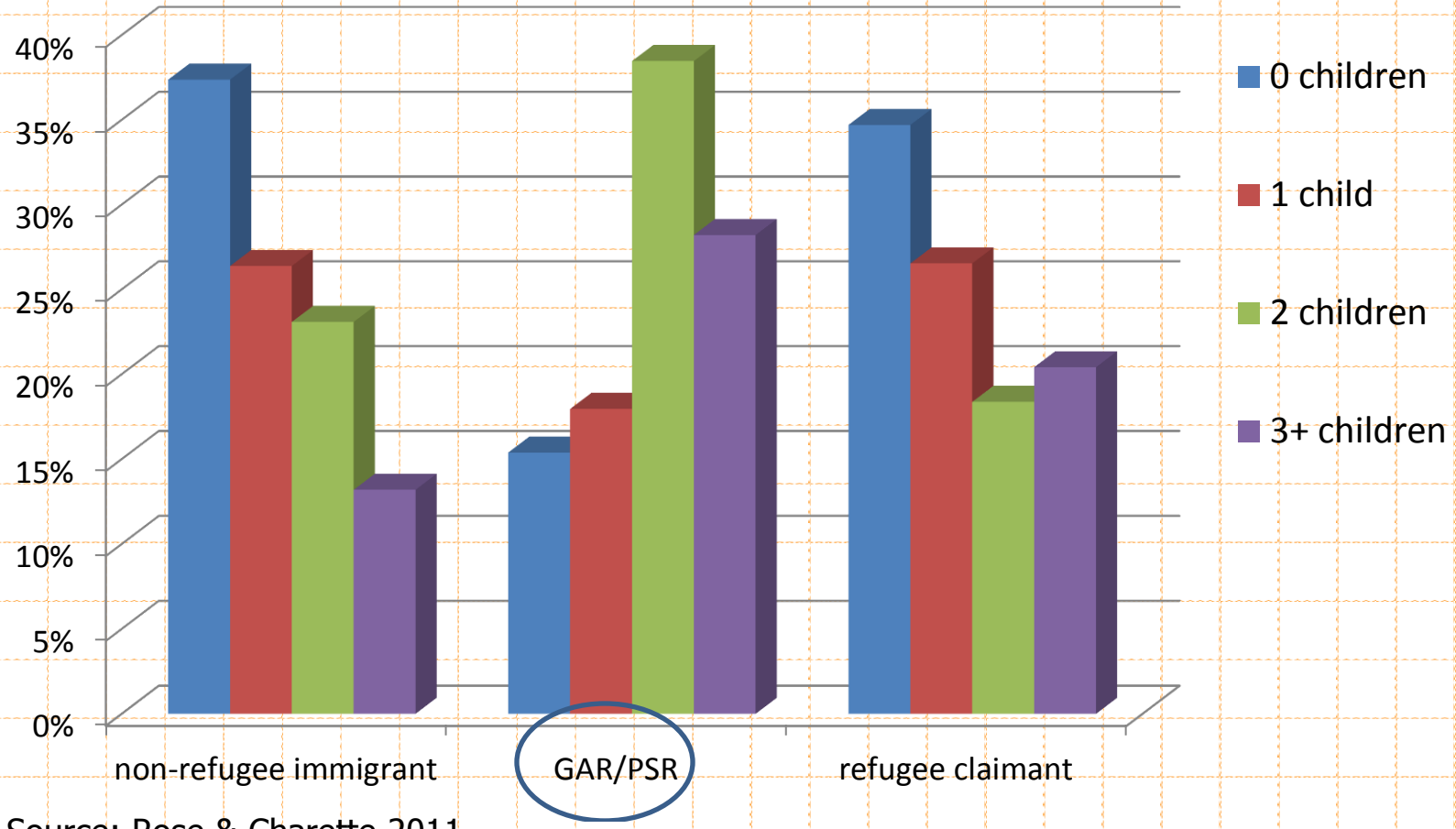


Source: Rose & Charette, 20011, based on CMHC, *Rental Housing Survey*, various years; data are for units in buildings containing 3 or more units and exclude units in the secondary rental market.

Montréal survey (2010-2011) respondents by arrival status and settlement organization of recruitment (N=201)

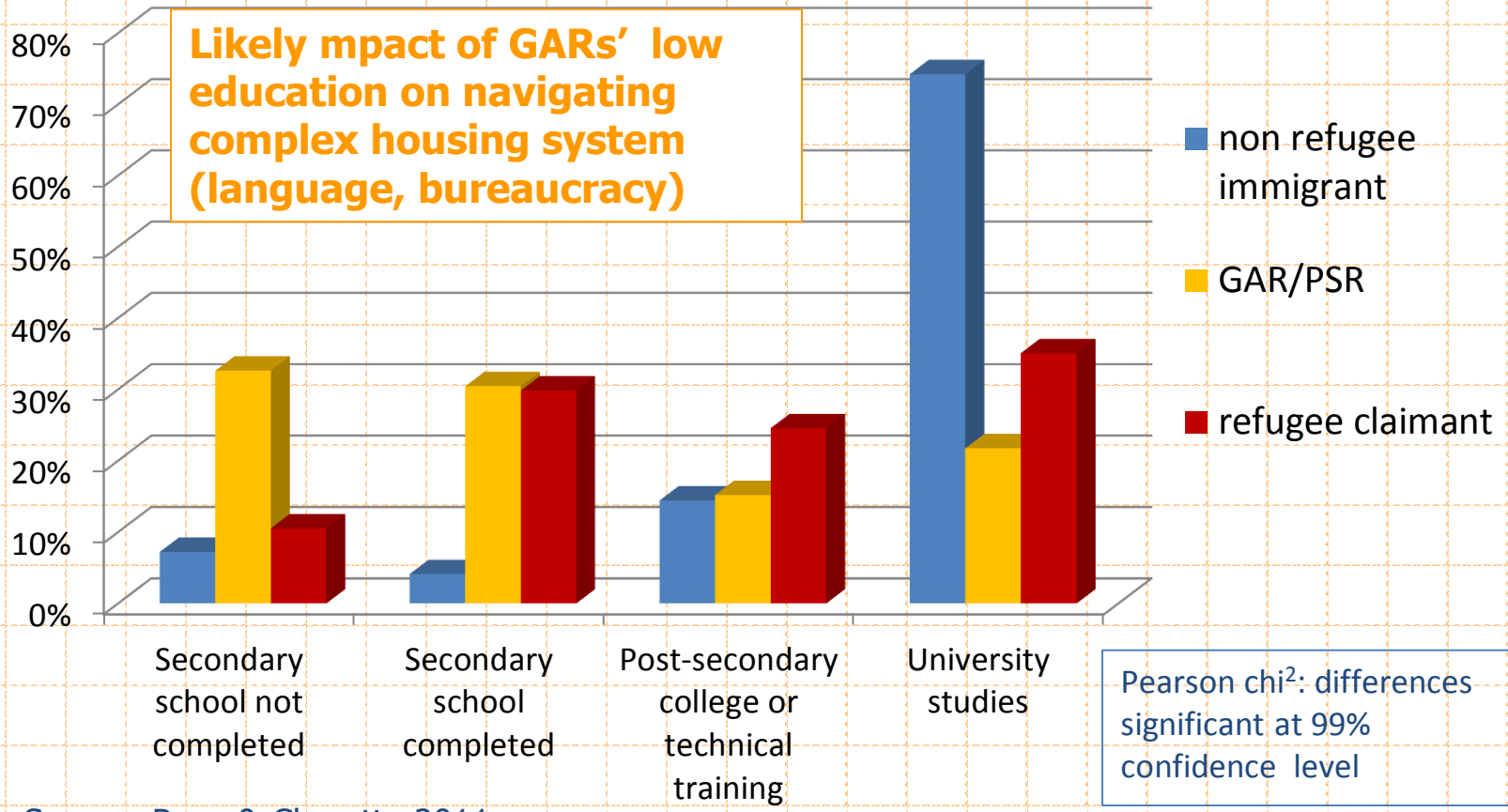


Number of children under 18, by arrival status, Montréal survey, 2010 (N=179)



Source: Rose & Charette 2011

Highest level of education attained, by arrival status, Montréal survey, 2010 (N=200)



Pearson chi^2: differences significant at 99% confidence level

Source: Rose & Charette 2011

Housing vulnerability: resettled refugees (GAR) with large families

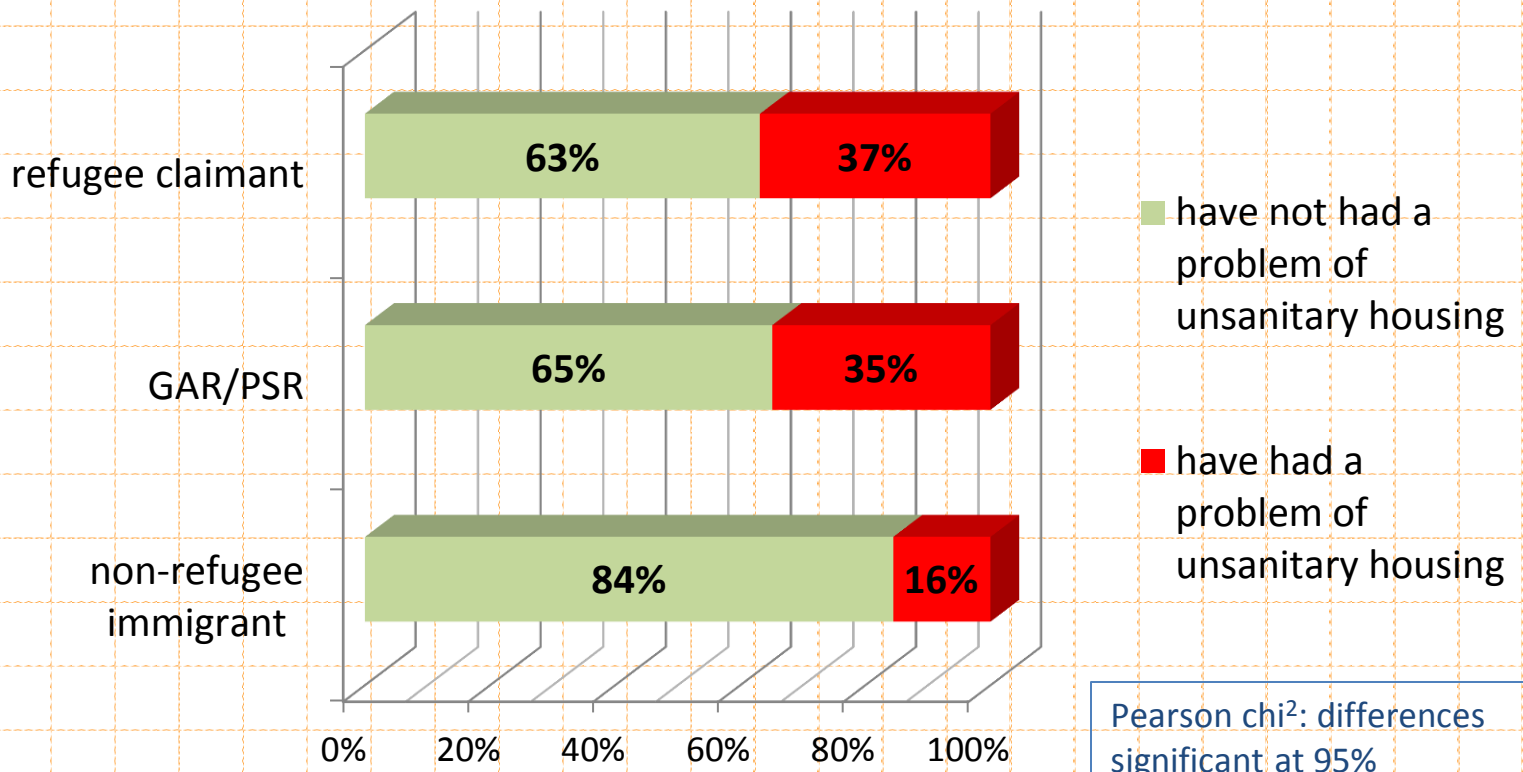
"The [French] language, I'll end up learning it, God willing. Our problem is housing. We need a larger apartment, but we're afraid [to give our present landlord notice]. People say that nobody will want to rent to you because you're a large family."

"Maria" (GAR, 7 months in Canada, focus group 1, Montreal survey, 2011: translation Arabic to French to English)

Source: Rose & Charette (2011b)

- Overcrowding and its consequences need more research (see also Pruegger & Tanasescu 2007)

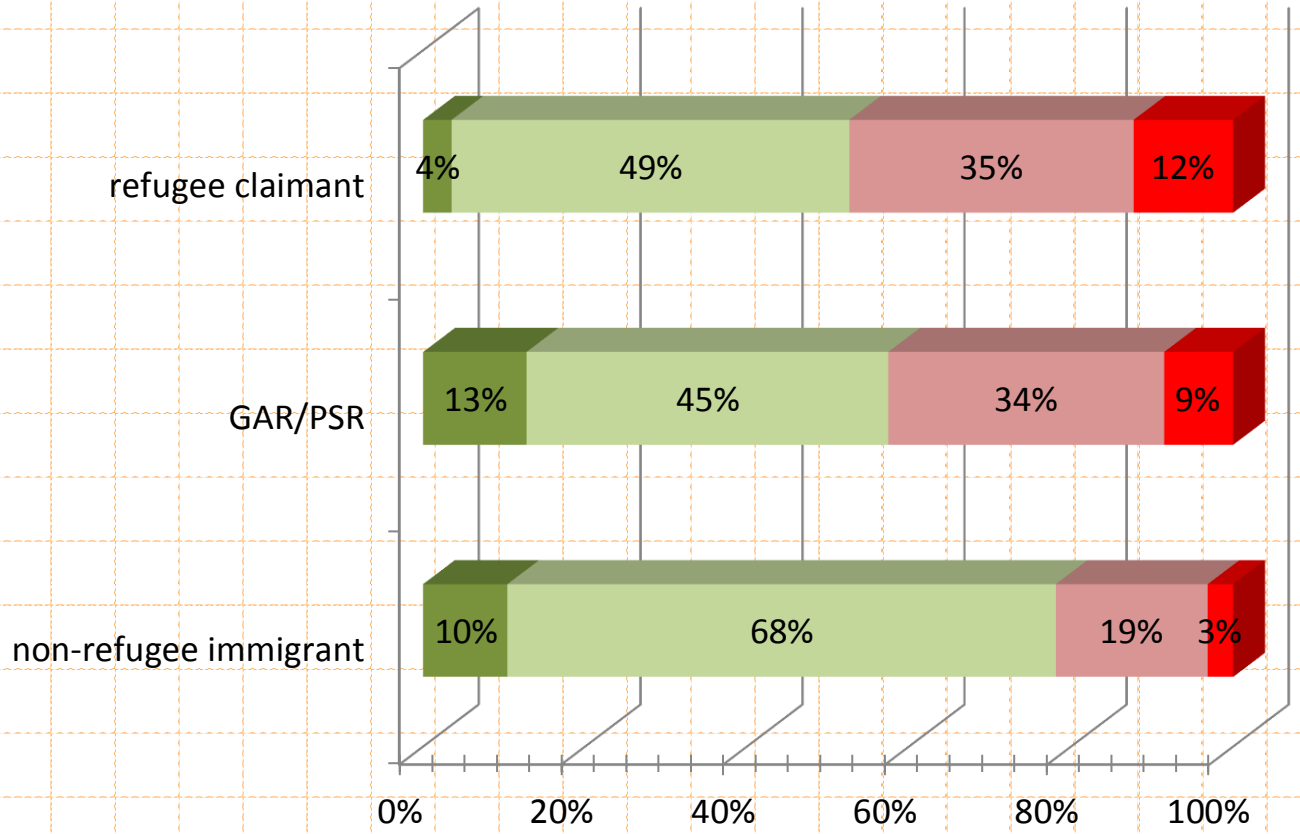
Experience of unsanitary/unfit housing conditions, Montréal survey, 2010 (n=190)



Source: Rose & Charette 2011

Pearson chi^2: differences significant at 95% confidence level

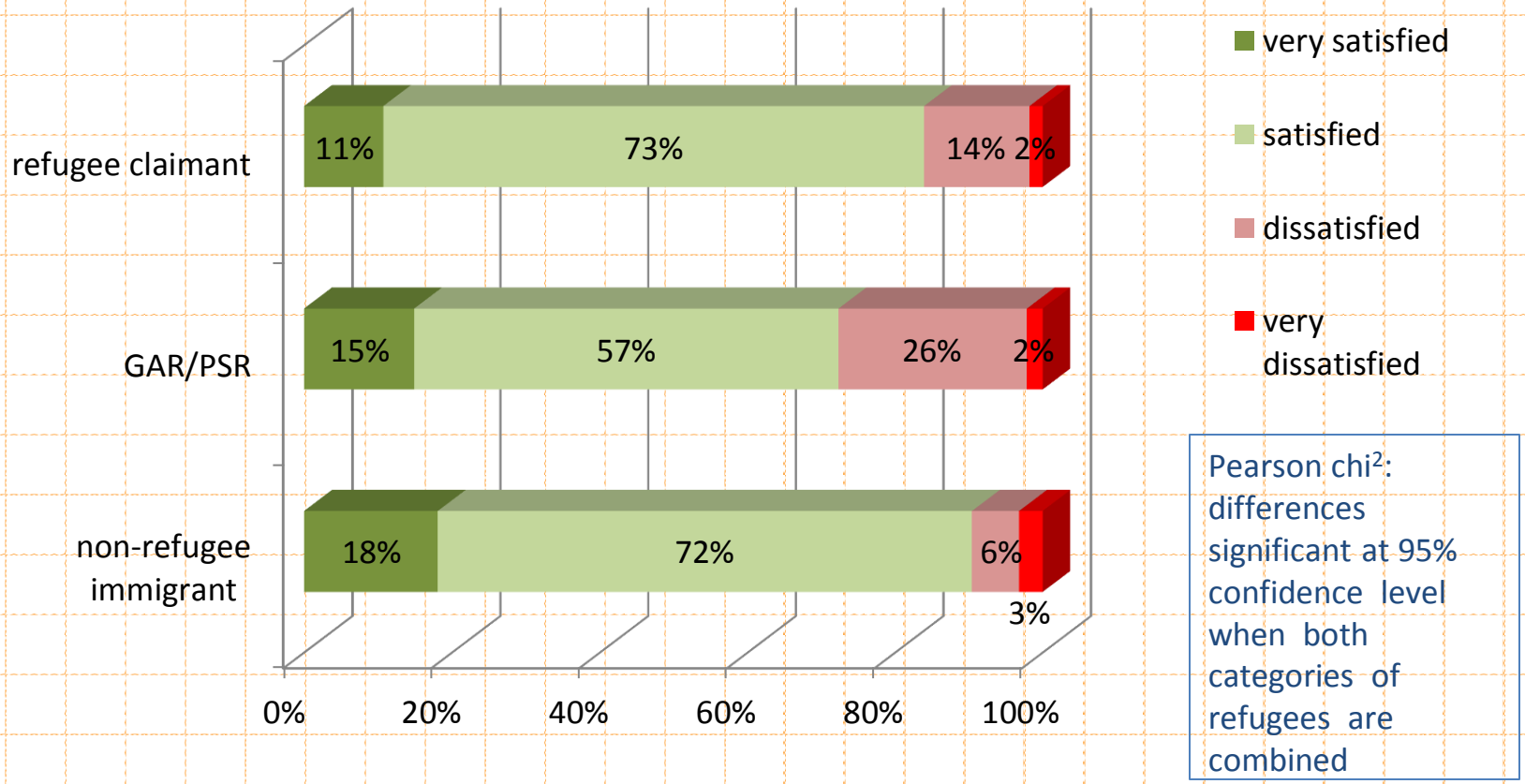
Satisfaction with current housing, Montréal survey, 2010 (n=200)



Source: Rose & Charette 2011

Pearson chi^2: differences significant at 95% confidence level; 99% if both categories of refugees are combined

Satisfaction with current neighbourhood, Montréal survey, 2010 (n=197)



Pearson chi^2: differences significant at 95% confidence level when both categories of refugees are combined

Housing vulnerability: refugee protection claimants awaiting the decision

"'"There's always a fear that stops us from doing anything [about landlords' negligence]… we say to ourselves… we are refugees… what rights do we have to claim something from a person who is from here?"

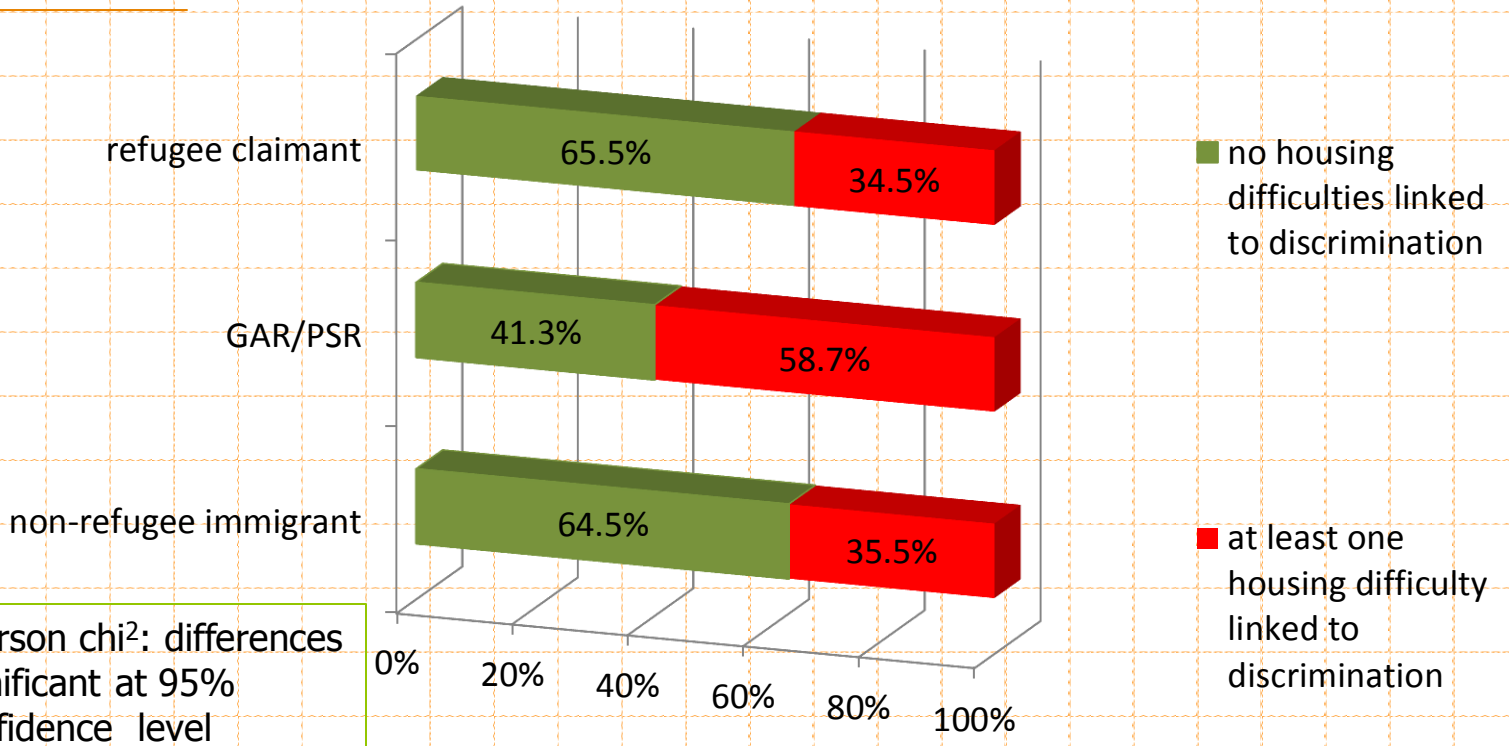
"Elsa" (current refugee claimant, focus group 4, Montréal survey, 2011;
translation: Spanish to French to English)

Source: Rose & Charette (2011b)

Housing vulnerability: very high shelter cost to income ratios, Montréal survey, 2010

- Most (64-68%) GARs and claimants/LCR currently spend over 50% of income on rent;
  but so did 51% of the economic immigrants in our sample (n=165)
  - These rates higher than for recent immigrants according to 2006 census
- Focus groups highlighted especial difficulties of single people in coping with housing costs
- Findings reflect inadequacy of social assistance levels

Experiences of housing discrimination, Montréal survey, 2010 (n=194)



Pearson chi^2: differences significant at 95% confidence level

Difficulties linked to discrimination = family type/age/gender/disability; country of origin/skin colour/religion/ethnicity; income source (social assistance); immigration status. Respondents were given an exhaustive list of possible housing difficulties. The word "discrimination" was not used in the question. Source: unpublished survey data.

MTV comparisons

- This part of our research not completed…
- Overall, surprise at similarity of findings between MTV despite housing market and settlement context differences
- Challenge of comparative analysis to be faced soon, taking account of study's limits

Main recommendations (Montréal component) - targeted

- Better housing-related information, earlier
- Resources for option of longer stays in transitional accommodation, and accompaniment to help finding suitable housing
- Fight discrimination and stigmatization
- combat barriers to employment
- Expand settlement services for refugee claimants
- Related research need on interprovincial variations in their social citizenship access, re-framed not only in humanitarian debate but also in wider context of expansion of temporary migration statuses in Canada

Main study recommendations (Montréal component) - mainstream

- Priority funding (all levels of govt.) for rehabilitation of private rental apartment buildings in 1946-1970 stock
  - This is where newcomers are concentrated, but benefits much wider segment
- More social housing…
  - Though this emphasized this less in Mtl than in Toronto & Vancouver reports, due to context differences

Challenges of "knowledge mobilization"

- Winding-down of Metropolis Secretariat has meant loss of KM channels to senior federal policy officials
- Trying DIY with media release strategy…http://www.radio-canada.ca/emissions/telejournal_colombie-britannique/2011-2012/Reportage.asp?idDoc=208202
- Refugee claimants: policy (C-31) going toward *increasing* precariousness for some, no guarantee of fast-track approvals
- More optimism re housing and GARs? Our study findings dovetail with CIC program evaluation (Nov. 2011)
- Also important not to neglect traditional refereed publications – held in high regard by senior policy officials at "elite" ministries like CIC: issue of competing truth claims in politicized decision-making context…

Thank yous…

- To the PMER at Western, for the invitation
- To our partners who made the study possible:

Questionnaire survey and focus groups (Montréal):

- CARI St-Laurent – Centre d'accueil et de référence sociale et économique pour immigrants
- La MIRS – Maison internationale de la Rive-sud
- La Maisonnée – Service d'aide et de liaison pour immigrants
- CSAI – Centre social d'aide aux immigrants
- CACI – Centre d'appui aux communautés immigrantes

Focus group only:

- Le Projet Refuge – Maison Haidar (Centre d'hébergement de transition pour hommes en migration forcée)

APPENDIX: DISCRIMINATION QUESTIONS IN SURVEY

Peu de réponses affirmatives à une question qui fait mention **explicite** de « discrimination »

Q16. « Je vais vous lire une liste de difficultés que vous auriez pu avoir sur le plan du logement. Avez-vous en ce moment ou avez-vous vécu depuis votre arrivée dans le Grand Montréal un problème de… »

- « Discrimination (quelle qu'elle soit) ? »
  - Oui : 7% (11% chez les demandeurs d'asile)

[N=191 pour cette question. Source: Rose et Charrette 2011, 46.]

Mais une question plus « neutre » sur les sources de difficultés vécues sur le plan du logement est plus révélatrice (→ diapo suivante)

Q.19 Pensez-vous que vous avez vécu des difficultés sur le plan du logement pour l'une ou l'autre des raisons suivantes? *(vous pouvez cocher plus d'une réponse)*

- Langue
- Manque de références
- Historique de crédit inexistant ou mauvais
- Pas de garant (personne ne peut garantir qu'il paiera votre loyer si vous ne pouvez pas le faire)
- Taille de la famille
- Type de famille (ex. monoparentale) *
- Genre (sexe) *
- Âge *
- Handicap *
- La couleur de votre peau/celle des membres de votre famille *
- Votre pays d'origine/celui de votre famille *
- Religion ou provenance ethnique *
- Statut de réfugié ou de résident temporaire *
- Votre source de revenus (ex. solidarité sociale, bien-être social) *
- Crise financière ou problèmes financiers
- Autres raisons_____
- x. Refusé

* = obstacles qui sont, selon nous, de nature discriminatoire. Lors de l'analyse nous avons donc créé une nouvelle variable binaire, « vécu d'obstacle discriminatoire (oui/non) »