

# Housing & Homelessness

A 2SLGBTQI Issues Brief for Federal Elections



Egale





# Table of Contents

<b>Key Takeaways: 2SLGBTQI Housing and Homelessness</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Setting the Scene: Quick Data on 2SLGBTQI Housing and Homelessness</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>The 2SLGBTQI Connection to Housing and Homelessness.</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Housing Precarity and Financial Barriers .....	6
Societal Stigma and Migration .....	8
2SLGBTQI Individuals Accessing Shelters .....	9
<b>Egale Canada’s Housing and Homelessness Related Research</b> .....	<b>10</b>



## About Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world.

Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal and none is other.

## About this Document

Every electoral issue is a 2SLGBTQI issue. When heading to the polls, it is essential that 2SLGBTQI experiences are considered and understood. To bolster awareness on 2SLGBTQI issues and experiences ahead of the upcoming federal election, Egale Canada developed a series of briefs that each delve into how electoral issues affect 2SLGBTQI communities in diverse yet intersecting ways across the country. In mobilizing knowledge to support civic engagement, each brief aims to empower 2SLGBTQI communities and allies to step forward and *Vote with Pride*.

## Key Takeaways: 2SLGBTQI Housing and Homelessness

- 2SLGBTQI individuals, particularly youth, face high levels of housing precarity.
- Trans and gender-diverse individuals are frequently denied housing or pushed into unsafe situations. Many refugees also face exploitation from landlords or neighbors due to their lack of familiarity with housing systems or fear of their immigration status being jeopardized.<sup>1</sup>
- Indigenous and racialized 2SLGBTQI people in Canada face unique and layered barriers to housing that stem from intersections of race, sexuality, and socio-economic factors. For many, racial profiling and discrimination from landlords, police, and community members contribute to housing insecurity.<sup>2</sup>
- Accessing shelters poses significant challenges for 2SLGBTQI individuals due to discriminatory practices, lack of cultural competency, and unsafe environments. Many shelters operate with heteronormative or binary gender policies, which fail to accommodate trans and nonbinary individuals.<sup>34</sup>
- Shelters frequently lack staff training in 2SLGBTQI cultural safety, resulting in environments where homophobia and transphobia go unchecked.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

2 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

3 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges," at 12.

4 The 519, "LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness in Canada."

5 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges," at 12.

## Setting the Scene: Quick Data on 2SLGBTQI Housing and Homelessness

- According to [Homeless Hub](#), 2SLGBTQI individuals are **2x** as likely to experience homelessness compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts, while queer women are **4x** as likely.<sup>6</sup>
- Across Canada, [Homeless Hub](#) found that **25%** of homeless youth identify as 2SLGBTQI, despite making up only 5-10% of the youth population.<sup>7</sup>
- In Egale's [Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada](#), **49%** of 2SLGBTQI individuals were concerned about finding housing due to discrimination.<sup>8</sup>
- 2SLGBTQI individuals and families have **much lower rates** of home ownership at **47%** compared to cis and heterosexual individuals at 69%.<sup>9</sup>

## The 2SLGBTQI Connection to Housing and Homelessness

Access to adequate housing is a fundamental human right in Canada.<sup>10</sup> However, 2SLGBTQI communities face unique, but not isolated concerns with finding affordable, accessible, and sustainable housing options. This brief highlights how 2SLGBTQI individuals navigate housing and homelessness in Canada.

The following section offers an in-depth look at how the electoral issue of housing and homelessness impact 2SLGBTQI individuals. In particular, this brief discusses

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6 Homeless Hub, "2SLGBTQ+."

7 Homeless Hub, "2SLGBTQ+."

8 Kim Seida, *Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada: Priorities for Research, Policy & Practice* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2023), online: Egale <https://egale.ca/awareness/qmh/> at 38.

9 Statistics Canada, *Family and Household Characteristics of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Canada*.

10 Canadian Human Rights Commission, "Housing as a Human Right" (2024), online: <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/right-housing/housing-human-right>.

2SLGBTQI individuals' diverse experiences with housing precarity and financial barriers, societal stigma and migration, with shelter access.



## Housing Precarity and Financial Barriers

**Homelessness:** 2SLGBTQI individuals are 2x as likely to experience homelessness compared to their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts, while queer women are 4x as likely.<sup>11</sup> Research has shown that 2SLGBTQI people face barriers in accessing housing when they disclose their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.<sup>121314</sup>

**Youth Homelessness:** 2SLGBTQI youth are significantly overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness in Canada. Approximately 25% of homeless youth identify as 2SLGBTQI, despite making up only 5-10% of the youth population.<sup>15</sup> Some 2SLGBTQI youth become homeless because of familial rejection of their identities, employment discrimination, and foster care involvement, especially for racialized youth.

**Difficulty in Acquiring Housing:** Finding adequate housing is a constant stressor for 2SLGBTQI individuals, with 49% reporting concern for finding housing due to discrimination. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 23% of 2SLGBTQI individuals had trouble finding a new place to live, while 14% had to borrow money to make their mortgage or rent payments, 10% left their neighbourhood due to affordability concerns, and an additional 14% were forced to move in with friends or family.<sup>16</sup> Trans and gender-diverse individuals face increased barriers such as frequently being denied housing or pushed into unsafe situations.<sup>17</sup> However, 2SLGBTQI communities

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11 Homeless Hub, "2SLGBTQ+."

12 J Ecker, *LGBTQ2S Adult Housing Needs Assessment* (2017) (Daybreak Non-Profit Housing), online: <https://lgbtqhealth.ca/projects/docs/lgbtq2shousingneedsassessment.pdf>.

13 David Elver, "2SLGBTQIA+ housing needs and challenges" *The Housing Observer* (2022), online: CMHC <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/blog/2022/2slgbtqia-housing-needs-challenges>.

14 Sterling, et al., "Housing challenges."

15 Homeless Hub, "2SLGBTQ+."

16 Seida, *Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada* at 37-38.

17 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

experience varying and context-specific barriers to housing precarity, particularly for Indigenous and racialized individuals, sex workers, and older 2SLGBTQI adults.

### *Indigenous Peoples*

For many Indigenous and racialized individuals, they experience exploitation, racial profiling, and discrimination from landlords and neighbours in trying to find affordable and safe housing. Particularly for racialized queer and trans individuals, police profiling leads many to avoid areas with a high law enforcement presence or to alter their behaviours to reduce suspicion.<sup>18</sup>

### *Sex Workers*

Many landlords and neighbours harbour biases against 2SLGBTQI sex workers, often leading to eviction or refusal to rent housing.

Landlords frequently exploit their vulnerability, threatening to report them to authorities or imposing unlawful restrictions.<sup>19</sup>

### *Older Adults*

For older 2SLGBTQI adults, accessing secure and affordable housing remains a prevalent issue. 17% of people over 65 years old and almost 40% of older adult renters currently reside in unaffordable housing.<sup>20</sup>

Both older homeowners and renters are concerned about the rising cost of living and elevated housing costs, such as the ability to make rent. Some older 2SLGBTQI adults even must return to work to help meet their basic needs.<sup>21</sup>

18 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

19 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

20 Celeste Pang and Ellie Maclennan, *Aging and Living Well Among LGBTQI Older Adults in Canada: Findings From a National Study* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2023), online: <https://egale.ca/awareness/alw/> at 28

21 Celeste Pang and Ellie Maclennan, *Aging and Living Well Among LGBTQI Older Adults in Canada: Findings From a National Study* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2023), online: <https://egale.ca/awareness/alw/> at 28

**Housing Ownership:** 2SLGBTQI individuals and families have much lower rates of home ownership at 47% compared to cisgender and heterosexual individuals at 69%.<sup>22</sup> Married same-sex couples and 2SLGBTQI individuals in Canada are also less likely to own homes while being more likely to live in unaffordable housing compared to their cis or heterosexual counterparts.<sup>23,24,25</sup> For Indigenous and racialized individuals, they are further disadvantaged in the housing market by negative stereotypes and assumptions about reliability and mobility. Some landlords explicitly reject Indigenous tenants, exacerbating their vulnerability to housing insecurity and displacement.

**Employment:** 2SLGBTQI individuals experience higher levels of employment precarity while financially earning less than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts.<sup>26</sup> Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Egale Canada found that 52% of 2SLGBTQI individuals experienced unemployment due to the pandemic compared to 43% of Canadian households overall.<sup>27</sup>



## Societal Stigma and Migration

**Migration:** 2SLGBTQI individuals often migrate to Canadian cities at high rates, in part due to available inclusive services or opportunities. 49% of all trans and nonbinary people living in Canada reside in the country's six major urban areas, compared to 28% of the general population.<sup>28</sup> Due to living in urban areas, trans and nonbinary individuals disproportionately experience high levels of rent or property prices, exacerbating issues around housing affordability.<sup>29</sup>

22 Statistics Canada, *Family and Household Characteristics of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Canada* (2021), online: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2018001/article/00021-eng.htm>.

23 M Dilmaghani and J Dean, "Sexual Orientation and Homeownership in Canada" (2020) 49 *J Housing Econ*, online: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2020.101688>.

24 Ontario Real Estate Association, *Fighting for fair housing: A report from Ontario Real Estate Association's Presidential Advisory Group on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* (2022)

25 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges," at 7.

26 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges."

27 Egale Canada, *Impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI2S Community: Second National Report* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2020), online: <https://egale.ca/awareness/covid19-impact-report/>

28 Statistics Canada. (2022). Canada is the first country to provide census data on transgender and non-binary people. *The Daily*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/dq220427b-eng.htm>

29 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges".



For Indigenous 2SLGBTQI individuals, moving to urban areas to seek acceptance often results in financial strain, lack of culturally appropriate support, and heightened exposure to racism and homophobia.<sup>30</sup>

**Stigma:** Some LGBTQI newcomers may avoid their ethnocultural communities due to pervasive homophobia or transphobia, further limiting their support networks. Others may feel compelled to hide their identities to maintain access to resources, which exacerbates their isolation. Without culturally appropriate or inclusive services, many refugees and newcomers face persistent barriers to housing stability and social integration. Additionally, pervasive stereotypes framing refugees as burdens on the system create stigma, making it even harder for them to secure employment or housing.<sup>31</sup>



## 2SLGBTQI Individuals Accessing Shelters

**Discrimination:** Accessing shelters poses significant challenges for 2SLGBTQI individuals due to discriminatory practices, lack of cultural competency, and unsafe environments. Many shelters operate with heteronormative or binary gender policies, which fail to accommodate trans and nonbinary individuals. Trans people often face exclusion from gender-segregated and gender-specific shelters or are placed in unsafe conditions that do not align with their gender identity, forcing many to remain unhoused or seek precarious alternatives.<sup>32</sup> Some feel pressured to hide their identities to avoid conflict, undermining their ability to access the support they need.<sup>33</sup> As a result, many 2SLGBTQI individuals avoid shelters.<sup>34</sup> Many queer youth also avoid shelters altogether due to fears of discrimination or violence.

30 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges".

31 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges".

32 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", at 13.

33 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", at 13.

34 The 519, "LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness in Canada."

**Sex Workers' Experiences:** Shelters are rarely safe or inclusive spaces for sex workers, particularly those who are trans or nonbinary. Reports from sex workers highlight instances of harassment and discriminatory policies that force them to avoid such facilities altogether.<sup>35</sup> Instead, they often resort to temporary or unsafe housing arrangements, such as living with abusive partners or in overcrowded and unregulated environments.<sup>36</sup>

**Lack of Knowledgeable Staff and Resources:** Shelters frequently lack staff training in 2SLGBTQI cultural safety, resulting in environments where homophobia and transphobia go unchecked.<sup>37</sup> For example, shelter residents may face harassment from peers or judgment from staff, creating an atmosphere of hostility. Some shelters prioritize the comfort of cisgender or heterosexual residents over the safety of 2SLGBTQI individuals, further marginalizing them.<sup>38</sup> Intake processes often ignore diverse identities, leaving 2SLGBTQI residents feeling invisible or dismissed.

## Egale Canada's Housing and Homelessness Related Research

- Andrea Sterling et al., *Housing Challenges, Barriers, and Realities Among 2SLGBTQI People in Canada: A Literature Review* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2024), <https://egale.ca/awareness/housing-lit-review/>.
- Kim Seida, *Queering Mental Health Supports in Canada: Priorities for Research, Policy & Practice* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2023), online: Egale <https://egale.ca/awareness/qmh/>.
- Egale Canada, *Impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI2S Community: Second National Report* (Toronto: Egale Canada, 2020), online: <https://egale.ca/awareness/covid19-impact-report/>

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35 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", at 20-21.

36 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", 20-21.

37 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", at 12.


38 Sterling, et al., "Housing Challenges", at 22.

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