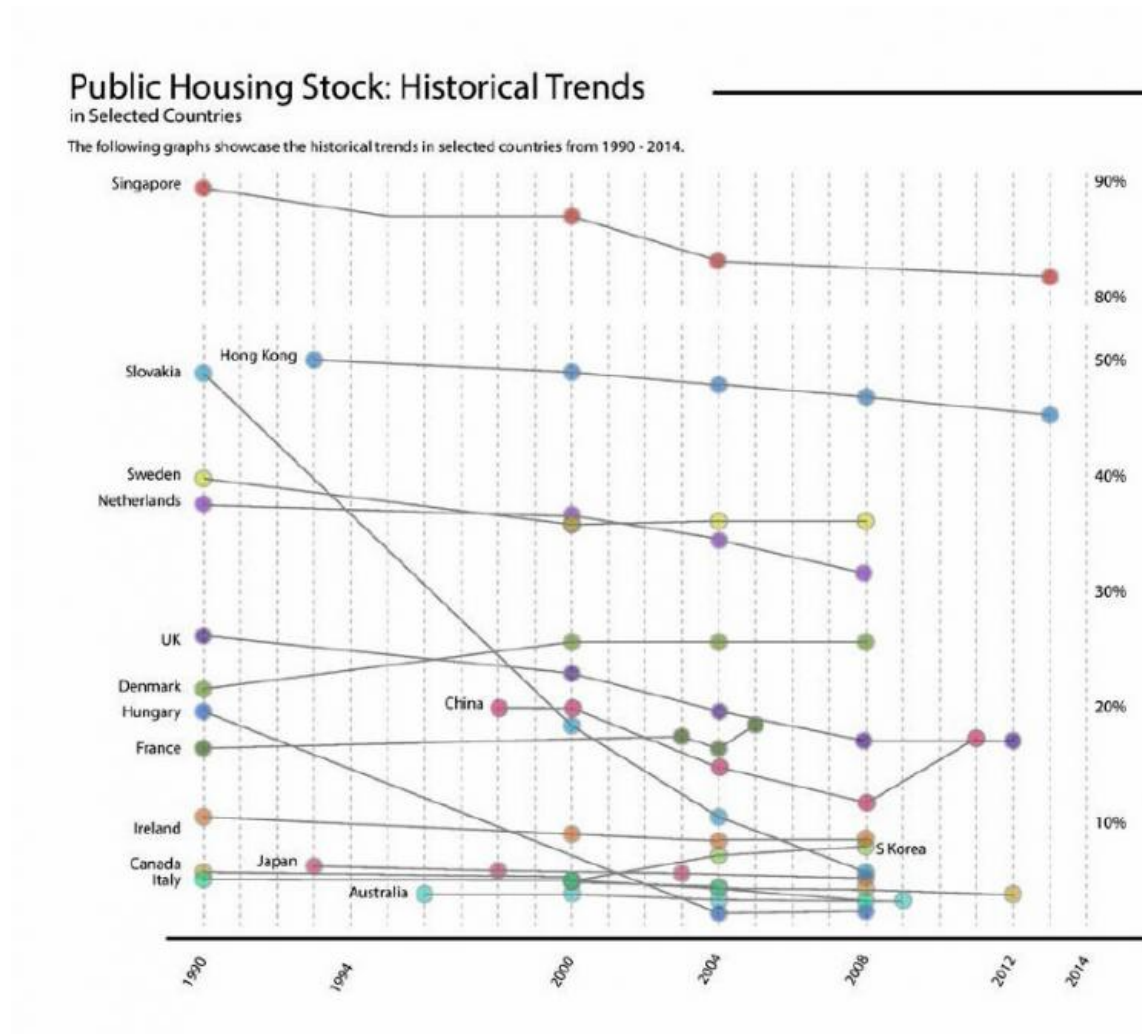


# Canada building less social housing despite risk of increased homelessness

May 22 2015



Credit: SCARP

The first 20-year survey of public housing trends in North America, Europe and Asia has highlighted the decline in Canada's public-housing investment. Researchers at UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP) compiled data from governments, housing and non-profit agencies, and academic articles for their report, titled "The Future of Public Housing: Trends in Public Housing Internationally."

They found that in 12 out of 16 countries with available historical data, including Canada, the number of [public housing](#) units declined as a proportion of overall housing. Canada was joined in this trend by the European Union countries, with the exception of Denmark and France.

Overall, the number of public [housing units](#) in Canada dropped by five per cent between 1990 and 2011, from 640,778 units to 607,038. When taken as a share of total housing, this represents a decline of two percentage points, from 6.5 per cent to 4.6 per cent.

"The federal government started releasing responsibility for [social housing](#) to federal and provincial governments in the 1990s. Unfortunately, this seems to have resulted in fewer affordable housing units being available to Canadians who need them," says lead researcher and SCARP director Penny Gurstein.

Public housing is commonly built for low-income and other disadvantaged groups, and consists mostly of rental buildings or housing co-ops, operated by governments or non-profit associations. Rents are set typically at 30 per cent of income.

Gurstein says the consequences of this downward trend in public-sector housing have been disastrous.

"Housing prices relative to income have sharply increased in urban areas, affecting access to adequate housing for low to moderate-income

people," she says. "The number of homeless—and people at risk of becoming homeless—has markedly increased in the last two decades."

Gurstein points out that although the trend is for mass privatization of public housing stock, some regions are reversing it. Eighty-two per cent of households in Singapore and 47 per cent of the population of Hong Kong reside in public housing. In China, a building program is aiming to hit a target of 36 million public-housing units by the end of this year.

**More information:** A copy of the report is available at:  
[www.futureofpublichousing.ca/?page\\_id=37](http://www.futureofpublichousing.ca/?page_id=37)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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