

Réfléchir. Agir. Bâti.



F I N A L R E P O R T

STUDY

ON HOUSING NEEDS AND RESOURCES IN
THE MRC DES COLLINES-DE-L'OUTAOUAIS





LIST OF ACRONYMS

HLM	Low rental housing (Habitations à loyer modique)
MRC	Regional county municipality (Municipalité régionale de comté)
NPO	Non-profit organization
ROHSCO	Regroupement des OSBL d'habitation et d'hébergement avec support communautaire en Outaouais
SHQ	Société d'habitation du Québec
TDSCO	Table de développement social des Collines-de-l'Outaouais

For more information:

www.tdsco.org
www.facebook.com/TDS.Collines

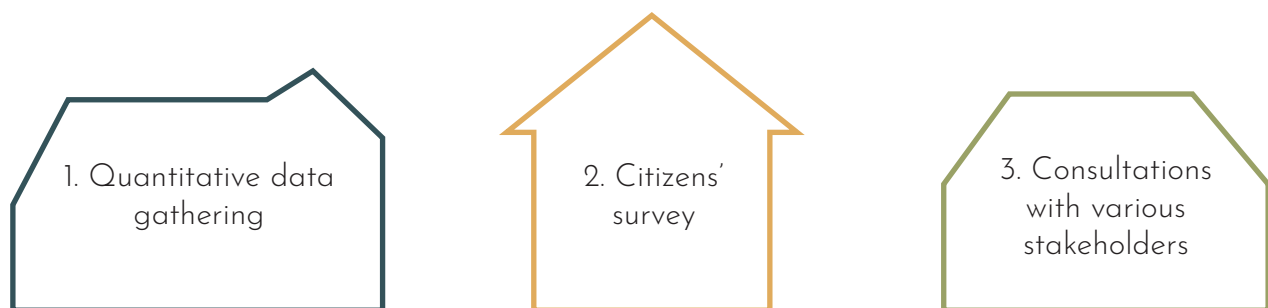


STUDY CONTEXT

As part of its objective to increase access to affordable, quality housing for all citizens of the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais (hereafter referred to as the MRC), the Table de développement social des Collines-de-l'Outaouais (TDSCO) and its partners have conducted a study on the housing situation in the MRC. The results will be presented at the Forum to be held on October 7, 2021. The final report will be released following the Forum.

The study was conducted in three phases: a gathering of quantitative data, a citizens' survey and consultations with various stakeholders (citizens, MRC and municipal directors and elected officials, housing stakeholders, etc.). The results of all the data compiled converge in such a way as to allow us to identify the main housing issues affecting the territory of the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais, namely the uniformity, the unaffordability and the state of available housing.

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HOUSING UNIFORMITY: A CHALLENGE FOR CITIZENS AND HOUSING STAKEHOLDERS



The MRC's housing stock is mainly composed of detached houses (89.4%), of owner-occupied households (89.1%), of dwellings with 3 or more bedrooms (72.6%), and of one-acre lots per unit.

This uniformity is problematic for citizens. 27% of survey respondents identified it as the most important challenge, along with high housing costs. This issue particularly affects certain groups and types of households: seniors, people living alone and single-parent families. The costs of a detached house are too high for lower income households, including persons living alone and single-parent families. 33.5% and 30.6% of these respective households spend more than 30% of their income on housing. For seniors, these costs are compounded by the difficulties of maintaining a large property and a house. The findings on housing uniformity are clear: there is a lack of rental housing options, affordable housing, social housing (especially for families and people who live alone) and housing options that meet the particular needs of many seniors. In addition to being an impediment to the quality of life of citizens, this lack of housing diversity hinders the economic development of the territory, as pointed out by representatives of the MRC and employment stakeholders who participated in the consultations.



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While the construction of rental housing has been booming in Quebec since the early 2000s, this trend has not manifested itself on the territory of the MRC. The limited development of rental housing cannot be attributed to a devitalization of the MRC either, since the growth rate of its construction permits value is the highest of the four regional MRCs, as is also its anticipated demographic growth between 2020 and 2041.

The survey revealed various obstacles faced by housing stakeholders in diversifying the housing stock:

The pressure exerted by the real estate market and the few levers available to municipal actors to counter it; regulations that limit densification and diversification; the absence of sewer and water systems that also hinders densification and increases construction and maintenance costs; the social context of municipalities that makes it difficult to reconcile the different needs and wishes of citizens; as well as, more generally, the poorly defined roles and responsibilities of municipal actors with respect to housing.



UNAFFORDABILITY: A CHALLENGE FOR CITIZENS AND HOUSING STAKEHOLDERS



The high cost of property and rental housing is the main challenge identified by the largest number of survey respondents: **35%** of owners and **34%** of renters.

Statistics show that 15% of households in the MRC spend more than 30% of their income on housing. However, this financial effort is significantly greater among single person households (33.5%), single parent households (30.6%), as well as renter households (31.3%) compared to owner households (13%).

The high cost of properties and rental units is the main problem identified by the housing stakeholders consulted who expressed their feeling of powerlessness in the face of the real estate market. The cross-border location of the MRC and the regulations restricting urban sprawl increase the demand and value of properties, particularly in the village cores. In addition, the lack of water and sewer systems and certain regulations limiting occupancy density and building size make construction costs high. These realities create financial obstacles for municipalities, but also significant obstacles in reconciling profitability for developers and affordability for citizens.



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There is a significant lack of structuring strategies to promote accessibility to affordable housing on the territory of the MRC, both in the private market and in the social and community housing market.

At the same time as the affordability of the private market is difficult to facilitate, the development of public affordable housing is stagnating in the MRC, notably because of the end of funding for the low-cost housing program (HLM) of the Société d'habitation du Québec (SHQ). In fact, there are only 51 HLM units on the MRC territory, 45 of which are reserved for seniors.

As a result of the stagnation of public affordable housing and municipal actors' lack of means to deal with unaffordability, the responsibility seems to have fallen on citizen groups who are the only ones developing social housing projects. This reality is problematic, firstly because affordability, rather than being ensured by a structuring strategy, relies on the ad hoc will of individuals. Furthermore, the realization of these projects is a heavy task to be assumed by groups of volunteer citizens who often do not have the necessary expertise and resources. Moreover, the technical resource groups that accompany them are limited in terms of the human and financial resources they have available, and are constrained by the requirements and investments of the SHQ that are not well adapted to the needs and realities of our MRC.

**2,813 households
spend more than
30% of their income
on housing**

Although the will exists on both sides to increase the affordable housing offer, these major obstacles could explain in part why there are no housing coops and only two housing NPOs on the entire MRC territory (27 units), despite the fact that 2,813 households spend more than 30% of their income on housing. There is a significant lack of structuring strategies to promote accessibility to affordable housing on the territory of the MRC, both in the private market and in the social and community housing market.



HOUSING CONDITIONS : A CHALLENGE FOR CITIZENS AND HOUSING STAKEHOLDERS

According to the statistics collected, 7.1% of the MRC's dwellings require major repairs. In addition, 12% of survey respondents consider that their dwelling is often, or almost always, in an unsanitary situation.



After limited choice and high cost, the general condition of homes is the third main difficulty identified by survey respondents, i.e. 16% of owners and 26% of renters.

Similar to uniformity and unaffordability issues, certain groups of citizens and household types face more challenges with respect to housing conditions. Seniors, homeowners living alone (especially seniors) and renter households were found to be among those most affected. According to the data collected, a gap exists between the housing conditions of owner households and those of renter households: 6.8% of the dwellings of owner households require major repairs compared to 9.0% of those of renters. This gap is more pronounced in some municipalities. For senior households, the financial and physical effort of maintaining a home and property is a significant issue.

The municipalities of the Collines-de-l'Outaouais feel ill-equipped to intervene in cases of unsanitary housing conditions, and even less so in terms of its prevention.



According to a report on housing in the Outaouais, municipalities are struggling to address the problem of unsanitary housing. This difficulty is attributed to a lack of knowledge in terms of insalubrity, the inexistence of an accurate picture of the situation, a lack of regulations to address and prevent it, and finally a lack of qualified inspectors in terms of salubrity.

¹ Regroupement des OSBL d'habitation et d'hébergement avec support communautaire en Outaouais (RQHSCO). (2013). Du château au taudis : le paradoxe de l'Outaouais. Forum sur l'habitation et le logement abordable en Outaouais. <https://rohSCO.rqoh.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2016/08/Rapport-int%c3%a9gral-Du-ch%c3%a2teau-au-taudis.pdf>





AVENUES FOR REFLECTION AT THE FORUM

Although these issues are not new, the data collected allows us to deepen our knowledge of them, to quantify them more precisely, and to bring out aspects that were, until now, rather unknown. By taking into account the obstacles faced by the MRCs housing market stakeholders, we can begin to reflect on the most promising solutions for improving the situation. While this inquiry is the starting point, this reflection is the main focus of the TDSCO Forum on October 7, 2021.



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