



Opinion

Don't let the housing crisis fan flames of xenophobia

We must hold our governments accountable for their role in the housing crisis instead of laying the blame at the feet of hard-working new Canadians.

Hans Jain

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Stifling red tape has created a bottleneck in our housing supply, making it more difficult for both newcomers and existing residents to find affordable housing, writes Hans Jain. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

As a first-generation Canadian and a purpose-built rental housing developer, I am worried that the housing crisis may cause an increase in xenophobia. Recent polling shows a sharp decrease in public support for immigration as Canadians increasingly associate affordability and housing concerns with higher immigration numbers. To reverse this trend, immediate action is needed to address the real causes of Canada's housing crisis: our failure to adequately plan and invest in housing infrastructure to accommodate our growing population.

Government red tape, decision-making disconnected from market realities, and soaring interest rates are stifling our ability to address the housing shortage—not immigrants.

Growing up, I watched my parents cobble together meagre savings to buy their first small piece of land. I watched my father work long hours even on weekends, bringing my brothers and me to job sites with paint-brushes and brooms when most kids our age were riding bikes. His ceaseless work ethic built our family business. Today, we have more than 1,000 units under construction, and will build 10,000 more within the next decade.

There are countless new Canadians arriving every year who have stories just like my father's—of hard work and a relentless commitment to making Canada their home,

while also giving back and making a meaningful difference. Immigration has been, and should continue to be, a source of strength for our country, bringing both fiscal and human capital to help build our nation. But I worry that by tightening immigration rather than solving the root causes of this housing crisis, Canada will miss out on a whole generation of talent and ambition.

This month, the federal government did not continue its pattern of raising immigration targets. This change has followed a shift in public support for immigration over the past year. But critics who argue that immigration is to blame for the

rising demand for housing are worsening the issue. Placing the fault with immigrants and international students for the housing crisis is scapegoating and fuels xenophobic rhetoric. Diversity is not the problem; it's a reflection of the strength and resilience of our country.

Immigration and efforts to address the housing crisis should go hand in hand. In fact, a good part of the solution lies in the problem itself: if we can encourage immigration by professionals in the building trades, we can both build our country and the housing that we so urgently need. But according to recent Nanos poll for *The Globe and Mail*, Canadians are associating the affordability and housing crisis with an influx of newcomers. In six months, polling shows an almost 20 percentage point rise in the number of people who think Canada should accept fewer immigrants than our 2023 target. I believe rhetoric surrounding housing demands for new Canadians and international students has perpetuated these sentiments.

It is quite clear that the key contributors to the current housing crisis have actually been the cumbersome bureaucracy and excessive regulation related to housing development. As a developer, I have experienced firsthand the endless delays and hurdles involved in obtaining approvals and permits, driving up interest and construction costs and, ultimately, the price of homes. This stifling red tape has created a bottleneck in our housing supply, making it more difficult for both newcomers and existing residents to find affordable housing.

As a result, people have been pushed to their financial limits, from being forced to live in their vehicles or on the streets, to multiple families or students sharing small apartments. While many newcomers struggle financially, now they may also face xenophobia if we allow blame for the housing crisis to be misplaced. This will undoubt-

edly limit the ability of newcomers to find their place in and make their contribution to our society. Increasingly, marginalizing new Canadians will lead to negative consequences for our nation as a whole.

The need is clear, and the timing is increasingly urgent. The will of all three levels of

government to make this a priority is what's missing. Provincial, municipal, and federal governments must work together to streamline regulations, expedite the approval process, and allocate resources to support affordable housing projects. I am one of many willing private sector partners

waiting for the government to get on with it.

We must hold our governments accountable for their role in the housing crisis instead of laying the blame at the feet of hard-working new Canadians. We need a comprehensive approach that tackles the red tape stifling housing

development, increases investment in affordable housing, and encourages innovation in housing design and construction. Skilled immigrants, like my family, are part of the solution.

*Hans Jain is the president of Atria Development Corp.
The Hill Times*