

**If you want to have a house, you have to stay quiet:  
Housing experiences of Polish and Romanian  
migrants in Ireland**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree  
(Social Science Specialization)  
at DBS School of Arts, Dublin.

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April 2019

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## Acknowledgements

Years ago, I heard the phrase ‘Standing on the shoulders of giants’, and I really did not understand what it meant, but neither did I know the difference between qualitative and quantitative research method. Today I know that this phrase is stressing that scientific work builds on all the work that has been done before it. I also know that all my achievements from the past four years would not be possible without a few smart and kind giants who offered me their shoulders, and without whose support, I would never have reached my goal. Therefore, I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr Annette Jorgensen ; you are true intellectual and an incredibly dedicated scholar. Your practical and emotional support in the dissertation process has been invaluable. Also, to all of my past and present lecturers in DBS, you have opened so many new doors and shown me how to save the world using dry academic language. My appreciation also extends to the participants who took part in the study, for their time and openness. I am grateful for my newly found dear friends Ieva and Marina who have been so supportive and such wonderful classmates to learn from. I wish to give my heartfelt thanks to people whose love made it possible for my dream of completing higher education to come true. To my dear parents, my sister Ania, and my brother Andrew whose unconditional love and continual support of my academic endeavours over the past four years enabled me to complete this thesis. Finally, to my dear husband, Mirosław, thank you for the years behind us for the years ahead of us, for being my no matter what.

## **Abstract**

Although migration has been part of human history, we could say that in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economic drivers of migration are more powerful than ever, yet in a multicultural country like Ireland where diversity is encouraged many migrants struggle with making a new home. The current housing crisis means that many migrants live in fear of losing their home with nowhere to return. While a number of studies have been carried out in recent time in Ireland on the growing issue of housing, there is no current study on housing experiences of the migrant population. This research aimed to explore the housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants in Ireland and picks up on issues related to the current housing crisis. The qualitative method was used, with semi-structured interviews with two Polish and two Romanian migrant participants and one NGO officer who gave an informed opinion on housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants, and enhance the data with statistics and migrant and housing policy recognition. The results showed that while some migrants have their sense of home in Ireland, they all are facing challenges when it comes to housing. In addition, the most significant finding from this study seems to be that the migrants might be affected more by the housing crisis than the rest of Irish society. Based on these findings it was recommended that a qualitative method study should be used for future research with a view to collect results that are representative of the entire migrant population in Ireland. Furthermore, the results from this research study provide useful information for future housing intervention programs and promote housing human rights.

## **Introduction**

When searching for a body of Irish literature dealing with migration, it is relatively easy to find a large number of studies. However, when it comes to migration with reference to housing, it is more problematic. Migration can mean leaving home and locating yourself in someone else's home country. According to Hage (as cited in Castles & Davidson, 2000, p.131) home- building is building of a feeling of being at home based on security, community and a sense of possibility. Further, as stated by Levis (2016, p.25) for immigrants feeling of being home can be related to the aspect of belonging, feeling of attachment to other people and places. This research will examine whether migrants are able to find this feeling in contemporary Ireland. As a review of this literature reveals, a number of academic books provide useful context on housing and migration. Also, a number of papers will be discussed here, two of which discuss housing experiences of migrants in Ireland. This research study aims to explore Romanian and Polish migrants experiences of housing in Ireland, a wider focus is also likely to pick up on issues related to the current housing crisis. Based on in-depth interviews with four migrant participants and one professional from the NGO organisation, this study will explore their personal and professional housing experiences in detail. The literature review presented below aim for constructing a critical theoretical framework that will enable addressing the research question.

## Literature review

### Migration

While we may think of migration as a development of the twentieth century, it is the process as old as human civilisation. The new thing about migration is that in the era of globalisation the speed of social mobility has overwhelmed policymakers and weaken laws and practices concerned with human rights (Castles & Davidson,2000, pp.8-9). Although the social media are focusing on the refugee crisis, 90 per cent of the world's 247 million migrants cross the border voluntarily, mostly for economic reasons (Woetzel et al., 2016, n.p). The idea of voluntary migration suggests that people make rational decisions to move for a better quality of life, but as Castles, Haas and Miller (2014, p.25) points out it is hard to believe that the process of migration it is a simple individual action but rather long drawn out process with a number of constraints. Usually, migrants have to overcome many different legal, economic and social barriers in the country of arrival. Starting over often in a new language, without the support of family and friends can be a difficult task (Lechner, 2009, p.202). The UN description defines migrant as someone who lives in another country for a minimum a year (Gilmartin, 2015, p.3). However, because migration is a part of more extensive developmental and societal processes the theoretical explanations of migration are also diverse, the traditional optimistic views under the functionalist social theory address migration as a phenomenon that not only benefits individuals, but promotes bigger equality in societies.

On the other hand neo- Marxist theorists argue that migration reinforces capitalist system based on deepening inequality (Castles, Haas, Miller,2014,pp.27-28). In the mentioned book authors make an argument that institutional practices also provoke preconditions for unsuccessful integration. Immigrants pay a very high price in terms of segregated, poor housing arrangements,

exploitative work conditions and destitute of family life. It is explained further that there are countries where immigrants with low social status are often kept out of certain areas by racism and are discriminated by the landlords provided with poor accommodation and high rents (Castles, Haas, Miller, 2014, pp. 274,298). At the same time, Solari and Mare (2012,pp.1-5) reported that living in poor housing conditions can result in stress and difficulties in social interactions for all members of the household. What is striking that from a dominant political discourse, migration is a problem that needs to be resolved by applicable policies. While high skilled migrants are still valuable after the 2008 economic crash, lower skilled migrants were labelled as unwanted (Castles, 2017, pp.5-7). According to Castles, global theories of migration should not focus on how to stop people from living their origin countries, but how to provide them with equal, civil human rights in countries of arrival (Castles, 2017, pp.5-7).

### **Migration in Ireland**

Since the year 1990s Ireland from being a country of emigration became a country of immigration ( Fanning, Munck, 2016, p.29). Migrants in Ireland come from more than 200 different nations (CSO, 2016 ). Munck ( as cited in Fanning, Munck,2016,p. 29) refers to those nations as the ‘The World in Ireland’. The 2016 Irish Census identified a Polish nationals as the largest group with 122,515 persons followed by twelve nations, each with over 10,000 residents including a Romanian population with 29,186 nationals ( CSO, 2016). CSO statistics also unveiled that there is a large number of Polish nationals that cannot speak English and are quite isolated from the general population (Gilmartin, 2015, pp.34,45). Irish society by many scholars has been characterised as ethnocentric, and Fanning and Munck (2016, p. 37) suggesting that after the 2008 economic crash the Irish native-borns look at the migrant worker not as a work colleague or neighbour, but as a foreigner. Furthermore, a study carried out by Fanning, Haase and O’Boyle (2010) that had concentrate on wellbeing, cultural capital and social inclusion of

immigrants in Ireland shows that although most of the immigrant population may have a higher level of education and economic participation than their Irish neighbours, this does not translate into social integration. Byrne (as cited in McGinnity et al., 2018, p.26) acknowledge that Irish professionals claim tolerance towards immigrants, but expressing racist attitudes towards them among trusted friends. Joppke ( as cited in Funning, Munck, 2016,p.190) suggests that there will always be the national difference in dealing with immigrants community. However, while the previous reviews indicate more negative aspects of migrants experiences in Ireland the recent EU survey on the integration of immigrants (2018) reveals that Irish people are among the most positive in European Union about social relations with immigrants. The results indicated that 92% of participants would feel comfortable having an immigrant as their friend or as a work colleague and 95% would also feel comfortable having an immigrant as a neighbour ( European Commission, 2018). This last point leads us to consider where immigrants live, and does participants from the EU survey were chosen from migrant housing areas.

### **Irish Housing policy**

According to O'Hagan (as cited in O'Hagan and O'Toole, 2017, p.7), the most obvious inequality and social exclusion in Ireland have their root in poor policy choices concerning land and housing. Housing in Ireland has been one of the central economic and social issues since the early 1990s (Norris, Redmond, 2007, p.1). Despite some years of strong economic growth in the country, reports in the literature confirm that housing was neglected for many years in research and policy terms ( Dukelow and Considine, 2017, pp.287,295). The dysfunctionality of the housing policies is impacting on the quality of life of large parts of society. As pointed by Healy and Kelly, (2018, p.45) Rent Supplement or HAP scheme does not help low-income families to buy their own house or secure adequate rented accommodation but continue revenue

flows to private landlords. In the past months with the high house prices and cost of renting, too many people can not find a place to live they can afford ( Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018). If a secure, affordable home is one of the basic human needs, how is it possible that Ireland one of the wealthiest nations in the European Union has a severe housing crisis. While there are different approaches to housing policy across Europe what is becoming common in Ireland is the housing market movement from social needs activity to an investment activity focused on privatisation and marketisation (Dukelow and Considine,2017,p. 299). Housing is now perceived everywhere as a commodity with an exchange value rather than as a basic need ( Angel, 2000,p.4). It is in the private rental sector that the inequalities in Irish housing are evident the most (Dukelow and Considine,2017,p.295). Based on data from Daft.ie, an Irish property website, the average monthly rent for one bedroom apartment in central Dublin is now € 1,585 - 30% higher than during Celtic Tiger Peak, 10,9% higher than a year ago ( Lyons, R., 2018,p.6,8,10). The rise in the rents together with poor security of tenure making people homeless. In November 2018 the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government report 1728 homeless families and 3811 homeless children in Dublin itself ( Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, 2018). The personal trouble of finding an affordable house or paying the rent has become a public issue, and it did not happen only because of a large number of people being affected but because it threatens society values and economic security ( Kenna,2011 p.114). As Mills ( 2000, p.130) has explained the trends that threaten our values are in accord with the dominant trends of modern society. John McNulty (2018, p.23) in his Marxist analysis of the present housing crisis argues that this growing number of suffering does not happen because of mistaken policy or natural disaster but because of government favouring one class over another. The Government action plan for housing and homelessness from 2016 called Rebuilding Ireland that addresses housing crisis under five pillars has focused on bringing more social housing units, building more

affordable houses, reducing homelessness and improving the rental sector. However, plan generally is view as unsuccessful. For example, Hearne and Murphy (2018) claim that the plan represents marketised forms of housing support that cannot deliver housing security. Grotti et al., (2018, p. 94) address the lack of attention to groups that might be vulnerable in the housing market.

### **Housing Policy and Migration**

Housing has a significant impact on the immigrant social and economic situation in a country of residence. The overview of immigrant housing in Europe (EWSI, 2016) highlights the disadvantaged situation of migrants across Europe in the housing market compared to the native-born population. The data collected from 28 EU countries shows the housing challenges faced by immigrants in the host countries. People from migrant backgrounds not only are more likely to live in poor quality accommodations, suffer higher housing costs, but also they often are unaware of their rights and discriminated regarding housing benefits ( EWSI, 2016). The data at European level also show that on average one in four foreign citizens living in the EU-28 are considered to be overwhelmed by housing costs compared with one in ten nationals ( Eurostat,2018, n.p.). Similar findings have been present by Coates, Anand and Norris ( 2013) in their study on housing and quality of life for migrant communities in western Europe. The results of this study demonstrate that migrants are more likely to experience lower housing satisfaction and reflect the literature review of the study that migrants are more likely meet higher housing costs and substandard housing, regarding size or quality ( Coates at al., 2013,pp.163,183).

### **Housing and Migration in Ireland.**

It is claimed that the majority of immigrants are concentrated in the private rented sector (Fetzer, 2016, p.64). It is worth highlighting that statistically, migration does not show major influence on rental costs in Ireland (Fetzer, 2016, p.64). Grotti et al. (2018, p. 11) discuss different aspects of inequality and discrimination relating to housing. They verified that while some minority groups like people with disabilities, members of the traveller community are mentioned in National Action plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 or Rebuilding Ireland plan, migrants are not (Grotti et al., 2018, pp.15,92). Furthermore, although significant additional barriers put immigrants at the forefront of the housing crisis often with nowhere to return, the recently published Migrant Integration Strategy makes no mention of housing. Murphy, Caulfield and Gilmartin in their study on Developing Integration Policy in the Public Sector (2017) have argued that current integration policy and practice in Ireland like in other UN countries have failed in ensuring equal access to housing rights for migrant populations.

Focus Ireland together with the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2009) provides useful research paper which investigates housing experiences of migrants in the Blanchardstown area. Although it is not a recent study, it is the only one using the qualitative method and focusing directly on the housing experiences of the migrant population in Ireland. The data relates to 40 people from Lithuanian, Nigerian, Indian and Chinese Communities (Focus Ireland & Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009). At the time of the study, the majority of participants were living in private rented accommodation. The study reports that major factors affecting the quality of housing and integration were poor access to services, a lack of access to information, overcrowding and language barrier (Focus Ireland & Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009). Another useful finding is that a sense of home combined with security was closely connected to the level of participants integration in the local communities. It was also found that some

participants experienced discrimination by landlords, neighbours or local communities ( Focus Ireland & Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009). Interestingly the research reveals that there was a difference in the housing experiences of newly arrived migrants from migrants that living in Ireland for some time. The researchers claimed that the quality of housing tends to get better the longer a person has been living in Ireland. Of course, it should be noted that the sample of the study was small so that the results of the study may be speculative. Another limitation of this study is that all 40 participants were from Blanchardstown area ( Focus Ireland & Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this review was to help the reader understand different aspect of migration and to identify a number of factors relating to the housing experiences of immigrants. Consequently, the other researchers present interesting results and have demonstrated positive and negative aspects of migrant housing. There should be no surprise that previous studies have shown that migrant housing can be characterised by challenge and difficulty.

While much literature exists about migration, very few scholars concentrate on analysing the experience within the housing sector of immigrants in Ireland. Furthermore, the recent research studies on housing in Ireland does not include migrant population at all. Therefore, this has provided the opportunity to answer the present research question on what the experiences of Polish and Romanian immigrants within the rental sector in Ireland are.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research approach was chosen as the methodology because of the in-depth nature of the study and the analysis of the data required. Barrero and Yalaz (2018,p.2) have argued that qualitative research has particular relevance for migration studies, considering its importance for understanding the voices of immigrant groups, and a certain degree of critical assessment of the reality being under qualitative scrutiny. The researcher was interested in developing more knowledge about migrant housing in Ireland through an understanding of the previous and current housing experiences, expectations, opinions, attitudes and behaviours of the participants. Semi-structured interviews were selected to carry out this research study. They allowed the researcher to ensure that respondents remained close to the topic but as well left enough space for the interviewees to offer new meanings to the study focus. As reflected by Galletta (2013,p.38) the semi-structured interview offers great possibilities to attend the complexity of the research topic by creating a space for the researcher to probe participant responses for clarification, meaning making and critical reflection. This research study was carried out in such a way that it allowed the researcher to collect data about migrants lived experiences and relevant issues in the area of housing in Ireland.

### **Participants**

In choosing the sample of participants, the researcher used a purposive sampling method, using the researcher personal, professional network. In this form of sampling, particular persons are selected deliberately to provide information that is relevant to the research question and goal

(Maxwell,2013,p.107). In undertaking this study, the researcher chose to interview Polish and Romanian migrants living in the rental sector in Ireland. The snowball method was also used to seek more potential participants from these individual referrals. A convenience sample of 4 respondents was obtained based on living at least two years in rented accommodation in Dublin. Of the four respondents, the gender breakdown was two female and two male. To enrich the data one more participant was selected from NGO agency who offer an informed opinion on housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants and enhance the data with statistics and migrant and housing policy recognition.

### **Procedure**

Qualitative research emphasises the importance of moral responsibility towards research participants ( Silverman, 2016,p.80). During the data collection phase, participants were interviewed at a venue and time chosen by them. The participants were interviewed either at their place of work or at their homes. Most of the participants display a preference for the interviews to take place in their homes. Before every interview, the background of the research was explained to the participants as well as the ethical considerations related to participation. The researcher kept a research journal throughout the data collection. The journal entries included notes on the researcher perception of the participants and recollections of how the participants behaved and spoke during the interviews. These notes allowed the researcher to recall the meanings of what the participant said in the interview during the data analysis and identify any distractions or comments the researcher felt were essential to the findings. Each participant was presented with a similar set of questions relating to their overall experiences of housing in Ireland and the impact which it had on their lives. The NGO officer was presented with a different set of questions from migrant participants. The questions were mainly open-

ended questions with a small number of closed questions relating to information such as length of staying in Ireland. A copy of the interview questions is in Appendix 1 and 2. Each interview was audio recorded an average length of the interviews was 40 minutes. At the end of every interview, both the participant and the researcher talked about the interview process itself and the impact of the interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and findings were entered and analysed in NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software program. The data were categorised and organised into themes and further sub-themes which emerged through the coding process. The next stage involved interpreting data and highlighting any similarities and differences in the data. In the final stage after working systematically through texts, the researcher verified and described hypotheses already arrived at previous stages.

### **Ethical issues**

Given the importance of ethics in conducting a research study, Dublin Business school goes to great length to protect the safety and dignity of research participants. Therefore, the proposal for the research was approved by an ethics committee in the DBS Department of Social Science. Further, following a formal ethical procedure was required when conducting the study and the research supervisor has ensured that research ethics were well known to the researcher. Interviews were based on voluntary participation, and the participants signed the consent form ( see appendix 3 ). Also, participants were advised that they have the right to withdraw at any time and that they were under no obligation to answer any questions which they did not feel comfortable with. Great attention was paid to the confidentiality aspects. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and the researcher did not enter any identifying information onto computer files. Permission was sought for the use of the dictaphone and recordings are kept in a secure place and were listen only in private. While Romanian and Polish participants were

able to communicate adequately in English to avoid any misunderstandings the interview questions were structured in simple language without any unneeded jargon.

## **Findings**

This chapter will draw upon the central themes and present the findings which arose out of the interview process and subsequent data analysis. The main aim of this research study was to explore the Polish and Romanian migrants' experiences of housing in the rental sector in Ireland. However, before exploring those experiences, the researcher wanted to understand the meaning of home for migrant participants and know if the participants have this sense of home at the moment, and that is the first primary theme that emerged from this study.

### **Home**

For all of the migrant participants, the home has been described as a place of comfort and security. Sara who has lived in Ireland for almost 13 years described home as the *“safety place where you can live, and you do not have to worry about anything the place where there is a quiet area and I can back home and enjoy relax I can feel free to do my own things.”*

Male participants also mention family as giving the meaning and sense of being home. For Sebastian who has lived in Ireland since 2006, home is coming back to people he loves: *“Home it is a place where you can relax and enjoy after your hard day work for me as well is coming back to people which I Love.”* Ken who has lived in Ireland since 2010 articulates having a sense of the home at the moment and attributes this feeling to having family around him and expresses his sadness towards somebody who is in Ireland alone.

*” I do yes, I have a sense of home because most of my family is here. I was talking to somebody another day, and I was very sad for her because she is alone (...), but yeah I do feel very*

*complete here most of my family is here so now I don't have any sadness or anything homesick or this kind of emotions."*

Also, Vanessa and Ken spoke of Ireland as their home. Vanessa referenced home to Ireland and Romania when asked about having a sense of home at the moment. However, this can be a result of going back to her country of origin in the past. When asked about how long she has lived in Ireland she stated that: *"So I came in Ireland 2003 and then I went back to Romania 2011 then back in Ireland 2015, so now we are in 2019, so from 2003 until now I missed four years.."*

So, for Vanessa, a sense of home is not a sense of continuity but something that it is an ongoing journey. She holds transnational identification shaped by the transnational space and various relationships. Further, she expresses the importance of the family and familiarity for a sense of home by relating the feeling of being home in Ireland to the birth of her son.

*"Ireland it is my home as well, because I have few good years in here (...) and because my son was born in here."*

Ken relates the meaning of the home to the place of residence:

*"Home well I feel Ireland is my home now I do not feel like Romania is the place that I want to be. So, Ireland is definitely a new home and the place that I feel comfortable living."*

While both Romanian participants stated that they have the feeling of the home at the moment, Polish participants feeling was opposite referenced to the uncertainty of renting a property. Sebastian while communicating that he does not have the feeling of the home at the moment wishes to buy the house not to have to fear the eviction:

*"No because like I said we renting so it doesn't belong to us, so I feel like I'm with the people which I love, and we try to make the place we rent as our home, but we really want to buy*

*something which will be ours, and there will be nobody who can throw you out from the place you try to call home.”*

Sara says:

*“I do feel good in my house. I live with nice people, but still, it is just a renting accommodation I never know when I will have to move out.”*

Furthermore, she pointed out that she does have a sense of home back in Poland in her mother and grandfather house where she always can go back if something goes wrong in Ireland.

In this case, home is understood as a specific place accompanied by a set of relationships that provide the participant with a sense of security.

### **Housing experiences**

Perhaps unsurprisingly there is a significant difference between Irish national and migrant community between owning and renting a property. As mention by the NGO officer interviewed for this study: *“you know the level of home ownership among non -nationals and Irish nationals and I was shocked in terms of the numbers in private rented there is only 7,1 % the CSO 2016 the Irish people in rented accommodation which 50,9% of non- Irish in private rented accommodation.”*

Evidence from interviewees’ housing experiences demonstrates that two of the main factors, whether migrants experience of housing is positive or negative, is associated with the housing conditions and with whom they share the house. Sara was the only respondent that did not mention having family in Ireland and talked about positive and negative experiences of living with different people. Although she started with a positive side:

*“I will start from the positive side because of the places that I was renting. I just met nice people*

*friendly people with some of them I am until now in touch.”*

Moreover, her current situation in the house is good:

*“At the moment I live in a place where we have quite good conditions place is nice and so far, we do not have any issues with any equipment.”*

*“I do feel good in my house I live with a nice people.”*

She did have some bad experiences in the past:

*“I was living with the people that they didn’t want me to cook in the house because they were vegans, I was living with people that they didn’t want to put heating in the house when it was cold because they were saving the money so you can get yourself in the place where you never gonna feel like at home I was living with the guy that he was a drug dealer and I end up in the garda station for 48 hours under investigation even tho I did not have anything to do with it so when you in another country able to afford only to rent the room you put yourself in danger or very unhappy place.”*

Vanessa, on the other hand, recalled the first housing experience in Ireland as being hard as the house was too small: *“Ok, when I came here was quiet hard because we had just a small place where to live I can say that time was not that expensive where we live, but the thing was the house was too small.”*

Furthermore, Vanessa was talking about her current house also being too small and how unhappy that makes her son:

*“now we live in a very small one which way not really happy because it is too small for us for three of us, but we cannot afford to get the big one it is it is too expensive.”*

*“(sigh) You know my son always is complain that we have the smallest house and he is hating the house because it is too small.”*

The researcher also noted that Vanessa sighs could be associated with an expression of sadness. However, further, she communicates that she encourages a son to be happy and appreciate that they are together. While Ken had described his current house as being good, he does not think it is a perfect place to live. He also reported a number of problems in relation to the current property:

*“there are few things at the house that are not the best how should I call them tears back we didn't have a heating we don't have heating system in the house so we had some troubles with that we had some electric oil heaters we had in the rooms, but we were not happy what we had in the kitchen because kitchen all the time was cold.”*

And he described his interaction with the landlord:

*“so we had to contact landlady couple of times, and that wasn't quite nice we had to push in order to get the heating system in the house, and then we asked for the alarm in the house which currently we don't have, and it didn't happen to get one.”*

*“we don't really get in touch with a landlady because we don't really have troubles there so probably that's why we are still there.”*

Sebastian reported how challenging were his first experiences of housing and point out the language barrier as a fundamental driver of those experiences:

*“Many Polish and Irish people also would take advantage of the fact that we didn't speak English once when we were looking for a house this Polish guy took from us 2 weeks rent and the studio that he rent to us it was of ready occupied, so it was hard on the beginning I had my sister in here and her boyfriend and just before first Christmas in Ireland we end up homeless*

*because we were young naïve and lots of people took advantage of us and of the fact that we couldn't communicate and seek help from anyone . The other Irish guy he took of us € 900, and we end up sleeping in the house without heating without hot water. It was December, so three of us was sleeping in one bed in clothes under two duvets. I never forget my sister, she was only 18 and crying because we didn't have nowhere to go, and we couldn't say the truth to our parents.”*

He also talks about no sense of security in his current situation and adverse effects on children and his marriage because of continually moving the houses, but also about motivation to improve his family life. The findings show that Sebastian takes the traditional breadwinner role and by not being able to provide security for his family he fears to lose his masculine identity. It can be assumed that for Sebastian, a cultural context from Poland in which his gender role beliefs have been formulated, play still a crucial role in his family life in Ireland.

*“The housing has huge impact on my life since I got my family I always worry what will happen if somebody say you need to live the house which is happen few times now like I said we got notice again so that why we applying for mortgage because before we got ourselves in really bad position we didn't have the money to rent more expensive place I didn't know were we gonna go the stress was affecting my marriage. The kids we had to keep changing the school for them which that was very bad especially for them as they had to live their friends and school that they really liked that did push me to upgrade my education get a better job to earn better money.”*

In line with Sebastian previous experiences with language barrier, the NGO officer also raised the issue of how hard it is for non-English speaking migrants when accessing local services and looking for help with the housing:

*“Dublin City Council nobody can’t communicate with them they need to go on housing list, so they need to fill the form submit documentation no one gonna helps them do that except us.”*

*“it stands now you are non -English speaking person and you go to Dublin city council you can’t communicate with anybody and no one gonna try like they might let you call your friend but it’s really minimum what they gonna do.”*

### **Housing and Society**

Female and male respondents seem to report broadly similar housing experiences, although women appeared to be more emotional when talking about their experiences and they felt less engaged with their local community. However, this may relate to their bad experiences in the neighbourhood. When low-income immigrants have no choice but to rely on low price housing in disadvantaged areas, this can lead to unfortunate situations. Sara points out that:

*“I don’t live in this area because I like it but because it is cheap, I would never buy the house in here.”*

She also talked about the bad experiences with local teenagers

*“ then last year thank God they didn’t come to our house they just went back to our back garden and robbed our bikes we went straight away to the garda station they catch one of them he was only like a kid 13 years old . However, its not only about our bikes there was a time last year as well when they keep coming in groups in front of our house throwing our bins banging the door calling us Polish bitches.”*

And how disempowering that can be:

*“when we said to them we gonna call the Garda they laugh and say that they underage, so the Garda can’t do anything to them. It is a scary thing that you are frightened by the kids but what can we do we have to live.”*

*“live here it's ok for me, but I wouldn't walk at night time I always try to take a taxi when I am coming back home I always avoid any trouble when I see the bigger group of teens especially at the weekend time I try to avoid them also.”*

Vanessa had similar experiences with the teenagers in her previous renting accommodation where the local area was not that good:

*“the area wasn't that lovely, was kind of disturbing from the neighbourhood, the kids and all of that.”*

*“you see at that time we were living the kids they want to have fun so when they want to have fun they were looking for something ( sigh)( ...) and I lived on the first floor(...) this a one example left the window open (... )and they just throw the chocolate through the window or the eggs or saying bad words (... ) that time that experience that was the behaving of them which wasn't that nice but anyway we moved from that”*

She also asks the researcher if she heard about Irish teenagers prejudice towards migrants

*I don't know If you heard the story that the kids don't respect too much the foreigner people and they don't behave properly actually(...) I think even now is this same.”*

Female migrants also shared their experiences on feeling discriminated by Irish people. The most important factor that interviewees felt it was that their Irish neighbours were not found to be friendly or welcoming. Sara revealed that she had a number of situations when people after finding out she was a migrant would not continue the conversation with her. Vanessa with a similar example stressed out that these factors cause her not participating in the local community. Interestingly discrimination of migrants was also acknowledged by the NGO officer when talking about access to housing:

*“I would say they there is a lot of its definitely on the ground a lot of discrimination against non- Irish people trying to access housing services you know.”*

*“Yeah, and it's horrific its I'm talking to somebody who is part of this particular council who is on the team(...) like her behaviour is you know and she doesn't see that you know that there is freedom of movement what you are saying you can think all you like but your govern by law and that person has rights to such a housing in Ireland and you on the team that says that supposed to work with people like that so you can't you get a lot of this.”*

In contrast, the male participants did felt their local neighbours are friendly, and they did not communicate any form of discrimination. Ken mentioned that does chats with his neighbours and last year he was involved in the marathon that happened locally, whereas Sebastian has talked about his Irish friends and his socialising in the local community. However, Sebastian reported that he has many friends especially ones with the language difficulties that experienced discrimination in local services: *“ Also, the people that work in these institutions can be very racist they don't gonna tell you that, but I have so many friends that went for help, and they were told that they not eligible for something even if they did work in Ireland for the last ten years and then they ask some Irish friends for help which they and It came out that they are entitled especially if you don't speak good English people they just don't want to help you and the feeling of embarrassment when you going ask for help and you have somebody very rude dealing with you showing that you are just unwanted .”*

### **Housing Crisis**

All of the migrant participants had expressed the fear or experienced the effects of the housing crisis in Ireland. The rising numbers of people seeking help in NGO agency can be proof of migrant population being on the front line of the housing crisis. As the NGO officer had

reported the data gathered by her organisation through monitoring and administrating processes in 2018 shows, they had 845 interventions with 340 Polish households and 1315 interventions with 821 Romanian households. Further NGO officer identifies that a large number of people was turned away due to the limited capacities of the agency:

*“We try to track how many people we turn away because it is helpful for funding and stuff, but I know myself because usually, we make a list we turn away quite a lot of people.”*

The large number of people seeking help from the NGO can also be connected to the lack of knowledge on the housing policies and regulations and discrimination of migrant population by housing authorities. The NGO officer, when asked if migrants know what kind of assistance and support, they could get when it comes to housing, pointed out that:

*“No I don’t think so sure half the people that work in the councils don’t know how this works like how people in streets supposed to know and I think as well it kind of rolls with you know in terms of housing and social welfare if somebody is told know you can’t get that they just go oh he must know and so they just go away, and I think, to be honest unfortunately sometimes that’s what the intention is you know.”*

When migrant participants were asked this same question, they were aware of authorities like RTB or Threshold, but only Ken did know for what he could apply if he had some issues as he applied before for social housing.

All participants criticised that the Irish housing crisis it is related to poor housing policies and lack of control over the landlords and agencies. Sara spoke about the landlords taking advantage of the current crisis for making their own prices and rules as people does not have the choice. Together with the NGO officer, they made a striking comment on Fine Gael political party:

NGO Officer- *“There are lots of simple things they could do but it just cynical person might wonder if there is anything got to do with half of Fine Gael been landlords I don’t know, but there are simple things they could do to try to make things a little bit better.”*

Sara- *“The scary part is that people say that half of the landlords in Dublin are from Fine Gael political party the one people that should look for a solution.”*

Furthermore, when Vanessa spoke about her landlord and shared her experience on broken sewers and the bad smell in her whole apartment, she revealed that landlord refused to fix the problem and alert her that he can return her deposit and ask them to move out. When asked by the researcher did she not think of reporting him to RTB for not following the contract she answered that in the current housing crisis tenants are vulnerable and that :

*“The houses don’t look right, and nobody is doing nothing it's too much so if you want to have a house to stay to not be in the street you have to stay quiet.”*

In the context of this example, it is important to mention NGO officer opinion on RTB:

*“RTB is just seems to be kind of developed in a certain way (...) I'm not been into any hearing in the RTB or tribe union, but I believe its quite intimidating and judicators are tend to be quiet bias towards landlords.”*

Nevertheless, for male participants, the landlords take full advantage of the current economic situation on the housing market. Sebastian called them *“money rockets”*, and Ken said that does not blame them as they are using the current housing market as an opportunity of improving their quality of life. Although the researcher could observe the negative reaction from both genders to unfair housing, the female participants tended to be more sensitive towards injustice.

The study participants also shared their views on how we can tackle the housing crisis in Ireland. Beside criminalising politics and changing the government, they agreed on the need

for building more houses. The NGO officer spoke about trying with other NGO's to influence government and propose some changes like to residency tenancy act:

*“proposing that selling the property would not be a grant eviction that you don't need the vacant possession to sell a private property its same ways, it is a business you would see tenant not affected.”*

However, she also points out that this particular change was proposed already by Threshold but without effect. Sara advocated very strongly for a need for more employees in social and housing institutions with a migrant background. She emphasised that there are not many social movements in relation to the housing crisis like we seen with the water charges because the people most affected by the crisis are non- Irish. Higher buildings and better infrastructure were the solutions of Ken, whereas Sebastian identified the need to improve housing policies to some other European countries standards. However, he also added that we live in a neo-liberal society where everything is for profit.

## **Discussion**

The primary objective of this research study was to examine the experiences of Romanian and Polish migrants in the private renting sector in Ireland. As the study highlights, there has been a lack of reliable and robust data on migrant housing experiences from Ireland. This chapter will provide an interpretation of the findings obtained, compare and contrast the findings to other research studies carried out, and demonstrate why the findings are relevant to the research question. The four themes were chosen for further analysis as they were present in the dataset and these themes have been: Home, Housing experiences, Housing Crisis and Housing and society.

The first theme to emerge was the Home which analysed migrants meaning and sense of home. When thinking of home participants associate notions like comfort and safety. In their description of the home, they offered a view, not to the physical appearance of the house, but the emotional and social understandings of the home. Their descriptions have echoed Hage (as cited in Castles & Davidson, 2000, p.131) and Levis (2016, p.25) concepts of home and provided evidence that for the migrant population the building of the home lies in the essence of the sense of security and belonging. While Romanian participants felt the sense of home in Ireland, for Polish participants living in the renting accommodation caused a sense of insecurity and took away the sense of home. Although Sara was talking about having a sense of home back in Poland, she still expressed a sense of insecurity in her current housing situation. These findings can be compared to those of Coates, Anand and Norris (2013) who argued that migrants are more likely to demonstrate less housing satisfaction. The aspect of feeling insecure by both of the participants might be explained by the awareness of the current housing crisis in the country. Perhaps it is difficult to feel secure when as reported by the Department of Housing in last months too many people can not find an affordable renting place to live (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2018).

A second theme to emerge was the migrants housing experiences. According to CSO statistics as mentioned by the NGO officer, the one clear difference between migrant population and native-born is between home ownership and renting accommodation. As the statistic revealed only 7,1% of native-born are privately renting compared to 50,9 % of the migrant population. Within that analysis, the positive and negative experiences of housing depended on conditions of the rented house and with whom the house it was shared. When comparing the results to those of earlier studies, it must be pointed out that the influence of relationship with other housemates on housing experiences to date remain unanswered. The previous studies have only focused on migrant families and did not take into consideration that migrants might share their

houses with other strangers. However, Sara's housing experiences demonstrated that sharing housing with other strangers can lead to migrants placing themselves in dangerous situations, exclusion and lack of rights to comfortable living. Vanessa negative experiences of inadequate housing conditions and her son negative emotions towards the small house have demonstrated how the bad housing conditions might bring anxiety for children and disempower the women in their role of the mother. Similarly to findings of Solari and Mare (2012,pp.1-5), we could suggest that living in poor condition result in stress for all family members and affects their social interactions. Moreover, from the emotions expressed by the Polish male participant, and Romanian female participant it could be inferred that both participants retained culturally traditional responsibility for their families. Vanessa presented herself in a caregiver role and spoke with more emotion, whereas Sebastian took the role of breadwinner and presented coping strategies for the family economic situation. Further, it was found that part of the problem with access to good housing for migrants in Ireland is the lack of adequate level of English language. Based on the CSO statistics and the findings from the previous research study on housing experiences of migrants in the Blanchardstown area together within the awareness of interviewed NGO officer about the issue it is suggested that the language barrier is starting to be addressed, but there is still little intervention to overcome the present problem.

The next theme which arose was the housing crisis, and as expected the rising number of migrant seeking help from the NGO agency together with a large number of migrants in the renting property can enable us to suggest that migrants are affected more by the housing crisis than the rest of Irish society. Overall these findings are in accordance with results reported by European Website on Integration (2016) who addressed the disadvantaged housing situation of migrants across Europe compare to the native-born population. Furthermore, the above findings can be supported by Dukelow and Considine, (2017,p. 295) argument that it is within the Irish private rental sector where the inequalities are evident the most. This study and some

of the current literature also ( O' Hagan and O' Toole, 2017,p.7) noted the poor policy choices concerning housing. According to participants the weakness in those policies lies in the lack of regulations and legal actions towards landlords and estate agents. Given examples demonstrate that landlords take advantage of the current shortage of housing when it comes to prices and living conditions. The supportive data of these examples can be seen on Irish property website where the rental prices are 30% higher than during the Celtic Tiger peak ( Lyons, R., 2018,p.6,8,10). Another example from a literature review in which lack of regulation may be connected would be an argument of McAnualty (2018,p.23) that the housing crisis does not happen because of mistaken policy but because of government favouring one class over another. Furthermore, these results ties well with the previous study of Murphy, Caulfield and Gilmartin ( 2017) who have argued that current integration policy and practice in Ireland have failed in ensuring equal access to housing rights for migrant populations. Based on the findings of this current study it could also be suggested that there is the inadequate provision of information and assistance to the migrant population. This could be seen in the NGO officer opinion about the lack of knowledge among professionals working in social and housing services when it comes to the housing rights for the migrant population. Another interesting factor from the study findings was that all participants seemed to have a good idea of how we could tackle the housing crisis. Besides expressing a need for building and improving the infrastructure, they represented a need for a more diverse group of professionals working in the housing institutions, stricter regulations and more supervisions of renting area. Furthermore, from suggestions made by the NGO officer, it appeared that the NGOs brought some rational strategies to the government attention of ready, but without further consideration. Under certain assumptions, this could be a good argument for participants opinion questioning political will for tackling the current housing crisis.

However, based on the findings from the last theme of housing and society, among difficulties facing migrants in their housing experiences is racism and discrimination in their local communities. This study has found that migrants are victims of antisocial behaviour and harassment by Irish teenagers. Although a similar pattern of results was obtained by another study by Focus Ireland and Immigrant Council of Ireland (2009) it is important to note that no research would try to verify Irish teenagers behaviour towards migrant population and explain reasons for such a behaviour. Furthermore, from the results, it could also be suggest that immigrants might be a victims of discrimination and racist behaviour not only from their neighbours but as well from people working in social institutions. As mentioned by the NGO officer she is aware that there is a lot of discrimination against migrants trying to access housing services and she did experience racist comments towards migrant clients from the person working in one of the councils. A similar conclusion was reached by Byrne who argued that Irish professionals claim tolerance towards immigrants but manifest racist attitudes towards them among trusted friends. Interestingly, the results contradict the recent EU survey on the integration of immigrants that indicate that Irish participants were among most positive in social relations with immigrants and researcher suggests that reliability of the EU survey data might be biased by methodological choices of the researchers. On the other hand male participants in the current study also expressed positive integration with their Irish neighbours. However, when looking at these results, the researcher speculates that this might be due to male participants living in better social areas. An important question associated with this finding is does a level of migrant integration, and housing experience depends on the housing area.

The present study not only confirmed some results of previous studies but also contributed to an understanding of the migrants housing experiences and demonstrated the range of possible solutions for tackling the current housing crisis. However, in the researcher view, male participants offered responses to interview questions in ways that were aligned with gender

roles and expectations. It could also be argued that male participants would present themselves in a different way to a male researcher. In other words, participants in the male researcher study may have been less guarded during a discussion about housing experiences and less concerned about presenting themselves as a masculine man. The contribution of the NGO officer brought additional value in indicating frontline policy and the previous research gaps. Of course, this study was not without its limitations. First of all, this study cannot be generalised, as the sample was too small. Another limitation is that the current housing crisis in Ireland is attracting a high level of social media attention. This scenario may have created bias responses from participants. However despite the above limitations many new results and questions have arisen from this research study, and answers will require further work. As yet, there has been no significant research carried out on the migrant housing experiences in Ireland, it is recommended that a qualitative method study should be used for future research with a view to collect results that are representative of the entire migrant population in Ireland. This study also recommends that it would be of benefit of the whole society if the government would take more seriously a human right on housing into consideration and provide more support for NGOs recommended strategies. There is also a need for a realistic assessment of housing policies and inspection of renting accommodations need to be conducted. In addition, it would be a positive input if the housing and social authorities ensure application of appropriate training for staff better understanding of migrant housing entitlements under European and national law, and by spreading cultural awareness would minimise the potential risk of discrimination of migrant clients. It is believed that this would aid the migrant individuals in coping with housing issues, restore public trust in government and institutions, and improve the functionality of the rental sector.

## Conclusion

The aim of this research study was to explore the housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants in Ireland. Housing is a fundamental human right. However, this study provided evidence that migrants in Ireland have to overcome many different legal, economic and social barriers in their journey towards secure, comfortable housing. The importance of society to understand the effects of those barriers on migrant housing experiences are crucial so that those who are not personally affected understand and appreciate the consequences of those barriers on the individual. A review of the literature was presented corresponding to the research topic. Therefore the most significant finding from this study seems to be that the migrants might be affected more by the housing crisis than the rest of the Irish society.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Qualitative Research Questions For Migrant Participants**

1. How long do you live in Ireland?
2. What made you want to come and live in Ireland?
3. What was the experience for you starting over your life in a new country?
4. Where do you live at the moment?
5. Why did you choose to live in this area?
6. Could you describe what 'home' means to you?
7. Are you having this sense of home in your life at the moment?
8. Tell me about your positive and negative experiences with housing?
9. In day to day life, what would you say about your integration to the local community?
10. Could you compare and describe your living conditions in your country of origin to your living conditions in Ireland?
11. Do you know where you could go to get help if you had a problem with your housing?
12. What kind of help that could be?
13. How is your housing experience impacting your life?
14. Tell me something about your housing plans for the future?
15. Did you ever have problems with getting a good place to live?
16. What do you think about the current housing crisis in Ireland?
17. What is your opinion about Irish landlords and renting agencies?
18. If you would have a magic wand what would you change in the renting sector in Ireland?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Qualitative Research Questions For the NGO Officer**

1. Could you tell me about your professional role?
2. What kind of assistance and support do you provide to people when it comes to housing?
3. What is your experience working with Polish and Romanian migrant community?
4. Does many Polish and Romanian migrants come to your organisation seeking help?
5. What could you say about Polish and Romanian migrant integration to the Irish society?
6. What are the major barriers faced by Romanian and Polish migrants when it comes to housing?
7. What could you say about landlords or renting agencies attitudes towards Polish and Romanian people?
8. Are there any differences between Polish migrants housing experiences from Romanian migrants housing experiences?
9. What do you think about the current Irish Housing Crisis?
10. If you have to compare native-born and migrant experiences with the housing in the current crisis would you say there are any differences in those experiences? If yes what type of differences?
11. In your opinion how does social housing policy address the needs of the migrant community?
12. What could be done to help improve housing experience for the migrant community?
13. If you would have a magic wand what would you change in the renting sector in Ireland?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants in Ireland**

My name is Justyna Grabiec, and I am conducting research that explores housing experiences of Polish and Romanian migrants in Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary, and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

**It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.**

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact Justyna Grabiec email [10269625@mydbs.ie](mailto:10269625@mydbs.ie) or Annette Jorgensen email [annette.jorgensen@dbs.ie](mailto:annette.jorgensen@dbs.ie)

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant signature ..... Date: .....