

Making a Home in Ireland

Housing Experiences of Chinese, Indian, Lithuanian
& Nigerian Migrants in Blanchardstown

Executive Summary



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IRELAND

Everyone has a right to a place they can call home

Immigrant Council
of Ireland

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Focus Ireland,
9-12 High Street,
Dublin 8

Tel 01 881 5900
Fax 01 881 5950
Email info@focusireland.ie
Web www.focusireland.ie

Immigrant Council of Ireland,
2 St Andrew Street,
Dublin 2

Tel 01 674 0202
Fax 01 645 8059
Email info@immigrantcouncil.ie
Web www.immigrantcouncil.ie

The full 'Making a Home in Ireland' report can be downloaded from www.focusireland.ie & www.immigrantcouncil.ie

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) and Focus Ireland jointly commissioned this important research into the housing experiences of four migrant groups – Chinese, Indian, Lithuanian and Nigerian – in the Blanchardstown area of Dublin to examine the central role appropriate housing plays in a migrant’s ability to feel at home in Ireland. This research project builds on the findings of a major research piece commissioned by the ICI and undertaken by the Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative based at University College Dublin (UCD) entitled ‘Getting On – From Migration to Integration’ (2008). The UCD report highlighted the clear relationship between settlement patterns and migration pathways, and identified some key emerging issues around housing integration.

Focus Ireland is a housing and homeless charity working to prevent people becoming, remaining or returning to homelessness through the provision of quality services, supported housing, research and advocacy. Founded in 1985 by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy, Focus Ireland works with single adults, families and young people believing everyone has a right to a place they can call home which is safe, secure, affordable and appropriate to their needs.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland is a national, independent non-governmental organisation that promotes the rights of migrants through information, legal advice and strategic litigation, advocacy, lobbying, research and publications, as well as training work. The organisation was set up by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001 in response to a need to support migrants coming to Ireland for purposes such as work, study, family reunification, self-employment or to visit.

The participatory research approach used in this study is significant in that the findings are based on the actual ‘lived’ housing experiences of migrants

Objectives of the Research

‘Making a Home in Ireland’ presents the findings of a small-scale study, carried out for Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland, on housing experiences and the ‘housing careers’ of migrants in the Blanchardstown area of Dublin. The study is exploratory in nature and focuses specifically on the experiences of migrants from Lithuania, Nigeria, India and China.

The key objectives of the research study are to:

- Assess the impact of housing policies on housing choices, settlement, and residency plans.
- Highlight the differences between various groups of migrants with regards to the experience of housing, including identified needs, problems and aspirations.
- Identify how housing experiences impact on the integration and social inclusion of the communities, and the barriers to integration and inequalities arising from existing housing policies and processes.
- Examine different housing experiences according to housing tenure, social, economic and cultural factors, as well as housing conditions and the risks of being out-of-home.
- Provide insights into the role of housing policies and patterns of settlement on the integration and inclusion of migrants from the Lithuanian, Chinese, Nigerian and Indian communities.
- Inform evidenced-based approaches to the development of housing supports, interventions and policy measures to promote access to housing for migrants, and generate public and political debate on the key issues identified from the research.

The research has been carried out using ethical and participatory research approaches. A variety of methodologies were used, including a review of national and international literature on housing and integration, an overview of local Census and other data on housing in the Blanchardstown area, consultations with key stakeholders, and in-depth interviews carried out by Lithuanian, Nigerian, Indian and Chinese peer-researchers with forty migrants residing in Blanchardstown (ten from each of the four communities studied in the research).

The interview participants reflect a sample of newly arrived migrants and those that have been living in Ireland for five years or more, and a diversity of the population regarding age, gender, marital and family status, language skills, educational background, housing tenure, employment and migration status. Individual case studies are also presented in the report, which are a useful research tool to highlight the more detailed experiences and biographies of participants in the research. The participatory research approach used in this study is significant in that the findings are based on the actual ‘lived’ housing experiences of migrants, as well as input from relevant stakeholders and organisations.

The study was carried out in Blanchardstown, located in Fingal County Council. This area has experienced significant population growth in recent years, with foreign nationals accounting for nearly 22 per cent of all residents in Blanchardstown in 2006 (representing more than double the State average of 10 per cent).

Housing and Integration

The relationship between housing and integration is particularly important as housing location and type can be factors that have a bearing on access to services, local community facilities and social networks. This relationship is affected by broader policies on migration and legal status, social inclusion, anti-poverty, anti-discrimination, income and employment.

In the context of the current recession, it is important that the integration of migrants remains a priority to avoid potential pitfalls of segregation. While many short-term economic migrants have returned to their countries of origin, there are many migrants whose home is in Ireland. For this reason housing, access to local services, community supports and neighbourhood planning policies will continue to be vital for their long-term integration. Many migrants work in sectors of the economy that have been affected by job losses and, therefore, it is likely that the consequence of the economic downturn will be particularly severe on some groups of migrants which, in turn, will affect access to housing and integration.

Housing plays a key role in the integration process.

Policies that aim to avoid segregation tend to be successful when they take into account anti-poverty and social inclusion measures; while measures to promote integration can benefit from migrant community and support networks. While government statements in recent years have raised concerns about the consequences of the segregation of migrant communities and the clustering of migrants in areas of low-cost housing, there is a need for some caution. 'Making a Home in Ireland' illustrates that people living in Blanchardstown chose to live in the area primarily because of affordability and proximity to work, and somewhat also because of social networks. If there is evidence of clustering, then it needs to be understood in the context of the availability and affordability of housing. While programmes for the promotion of greater dispersal and mixed communities are generally viewed as helping to overcome clusters of deprivation, they can also work against integration

if they do not fully take account of the reasons for and causes of migrants' housing pathways.

Housing, therefore, plays a key role in the integration process. This study shows that integration is closely connected to language, access to local services, participation in local communities, and acceptance by local people. Without these four determinants of integration being in place, it will continue to be difficult for people to integrate fully. In turn, those people who are the most integrated are also those who feel that they are the most accepted and welcomed by local people.

Findings from Qualitative Research

The main findings from the qualitative survey of forty people from the Lithuanian, Nigerian, Indian and Chinese communities are summarised below:

Patterns of housing

- Migrants from the four communities experienced different patterns of housing from those in the general Irish population. The survey found that the majority of interviewees were living in privately rented accommodation, while home ownership was highest in the Indian community.
- Reasons for living in the Blanchardstown area were related to proximity to work, affordability of housing and knowing people in the area.

Housing conditions and housing quality

- A large number of respondents were living in shared accommodation and in some cases households were overcrowded. Overcrowding, combined with cost and other aspects of the quality of housing, were common reasons why people moved regularly in the privately rented sector.
- Sharing accommodation was closely related to the affordability of housing. The majority of respondents found housing to be very expensive and paid a large proportion of their incomes on housing. Those in home ownership regularly let out rooms or shared with other families, while the highest rate of sharing existed in the privately rented sector.
- Evidence from interviewees' housing pathways shows that the quality of accommodation tends to improve the longer a person has been resident in Ireland. Newly arrived migrants experienced the worst living conditions, often sharing and moving regularly.

Housing tenure and housing quality

- The poorest living conditions were found in the privately rented sector, where the quality of accommodation was rated as average or bad. Overcrowded living conditions, a lack of space, insecurity of tenure, damp housing, limited furnishings and landlords not carrying out repairs, were commonly reported by those in poor quality housing.
- Those living in owner-occupied housing, local authority housing, and newly built premises to rent experienced good housing conditions. This was particularly the case in the Indian community and to a lesser extent in the Nigerian community.
- People living on rent allowance experienced significant problems in finding suitable and good quality accommodation. Several felt discriminated against by landlords and had to move regularly.

Legal status and housing quality

- Legal status also impacted on access to good quality housing. For some interviewees, being undocumented meant that there was no possibility to complain about housing conditions or to have access to local services. For others, gaining legal status enabled them to access local authority rented accommodation and home ownership.

Integration into the local community

- Interviewees stated that their level of integration into the local community was impeded by a lack of information, poor access to services, language difficulties, different and long working hours, low pay, lack of acceptance by local people, lack of community facilities and cultural differences. Access to local services and information was the highest in the Nigerian community and lowest in the Chinese community.
- The most important factors that people felt would facilitate integration into the local community included being able to speak the English language well, having better access to local services and information, improved community facilities, and acceptance by neighbours and the local community.

Access to local services

- Some specific issues were raised in the interviews about access to local services, such as health care, schools,

childcare, information and the local bus service. Some families had difficulty finding school places for their children and, in at least two cases, children were attending schools outside Blanchardstown.

The local neighbourhood

- Many of those interviewed did not feel safe in their local neighbourhoods. Several had experienced theft or harassment, and in some cases local people were not found to be friendly or welcoming. In contrast a number of interviewees found their local neighbours to be friendly and welcoming. Some respondents stated that it was a positive experience to live in a multi-cultural neighbourhood.
- Many interviewees aspired to better quality accommodation, greater security of housing tenure and security in their local neighbourhoods.

Sense of home and belonging

- Interviewees' 'sense of home' and belonging were affected by legal status, the ability to make long-term plans, and housing conditions. Having a sense of home was also found to be closely linked to a sense of belonging and connection and, in turn, to integration. For some interviewees, 'home' was where their families lived in their countries of origin; while for others who planned to stay in the long-term, home was Blanchardstown.
- Several interviewees living in privately rented accommodation felt that their accommodation was not 'home', rather a place to live while they were working in Ireland. Those who felt the most integrated also had the best sense of home.

In the context of the current recession, it is important that the integration of migrants remains a priority to avoid potential pitfalls of segregation.

Discussion and Conclusions

The research has found that where people live and settle is important in determining the quality of their lives, their access to services, and their long-term integration. A person's legal/migration status and the length of time they have been living in Ireland impact on housing choices, the tenure in which they live, and their long-term housing plans. Poor housing can lead to exclusion, overcrowding and poor health, while good housing is important to integration and a sense of 'home' and belonging. Housing policies play a key role in influencing patterns of settlement and housing provision, which, in turn, can impact on segregation and clustering.

The research has shown that migrants from the Lithuanian, Nigerian, Indian and Chinese communities have had different patterns of housing from those experienced in the general Irish population. The majority of interviewees were living in privately rented accommodation. This was often of a poor quality, overcrowded, in a poor state of repair, with inadequate heating, furniture, fixtures and fittings. Insecurity of tenure and a lack of legal rights for tenants are found to negatively affect people's sense of housing security and long-term plans. People living on Rent Allowance experienced some of the most significant problems in finding suitable, long-term, good quality accommodation; this is an area where respondents felt they were discriminated against by landlords who were reluctant to rent to social welfare recipients.

Having access to good quality, sustainable and long-term housing options in the privately rented sector is therefore a key issue that needs to be addressed in policy and housing provision. In contrast, a number of migrants, particularly those living in owner-occupied housing and those living in newly built premises to rent, experienced good housing conditions.

There is also evidence that some migrants experienced discrimination in housing (including discrimination by landlords, neighbours and the local community), higher levels of overcrowding, were at greater risk of homelessness, and displayed a tendency to cluster in lower-cost areas of housing.

Knowing how the housing system works and access to information about rights, entitlements and responsibilities are also found to be major issues for the improved integration of migrants in housing. Neighbourhood planning, community development, and the integration of newly arrived migrants are all crucial to their long-term integration.

It is interesting to note that the survey found evidence from the housing pathways of interviewees that the quality of accommodation tends to improve the longer a person has been resident in Ireland. Newly arrived migrants experienced the worst living conditions, often sharing and moving regularly.

This raises some important issues for policy-making and for the provision of information and assistance to newly arrived migrants in their settlement plans.

Another key issue raised is the way in which services are planned in local areas, particularly in regard to local transport, health and education services. The findings from this study show that poor access to services, a lack of access to information, and language difficulties were major factors affecting integration, combined with a lack of acceptance by local people, lack of community facilities and cultural differences.

The research has found that where people live and settle is important in determining the quality of their lives, their access to services, and their long-term integration.

Legal status and the ability to plan in the long-term are factors that can impact on good quality housing. This study has shown that being undocumented, or having short-term permits, works against integration, particularly as people in these situations are often reluctant to complain about housing conditions. For some people gaining legal status, or having EU citizenship (as is the case of the Lithuanian respondents), enabled them to access social and affordable housing, and home ownership. While some temporarily resident migrants were limited in their housing choices, a number of Indian people who had purchased their own houses did so in order to have access to secure and better quality housing.

Local community policing and improved local security are particularly important to migrant communities, especially where they are not fully accepted in their local communities. Better community awareness of the needs of migrant communities could also help improve integration. This is borne out by the experiences of some respondents who felt more integrated because they were accepted by local people and were welcomed into local communities. Breaking down the isolation experienced by some migrants is closely allied to improving a sense of belonging and assisting integration, and this could also help to improve connections between local people and new arrivals.

Integration is also closely linked to people's sense of 'home' and belonging. If people are able to plan in the long term and create good quality homes for themselves and their families, they are more likely to feel that they belong. This is often not the case for people living in poorer quality and insecure privately rented housing. In this study a sense of 'home', linked with security and safety, was intrinsic to the extent to which people participated in and felt integrated into their communities.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged from the research:

1. Clusters not ghettos

- Recognition from policy-makers at a local and national level that clustering of migrant communities is positive, but active measures are required to prevent clusters from becoming ghettos.
- The Office for Social Inclusion needs to ensure that anti-poverty and social inclusion measures and policies address the rights of the most vulnerable migrants, including those working in exploitative and low-paid employment.
- The Minister for Integration needs to promote greater collaboration between government departments, local authorities, local area partnerships, local agencies and service providers in the development and implementation of migrant integration.
- Local authorities in partnership with other key stakeholders should ensure that local migrant integration issues, such as neighbourhood planning, estate management, transport, community policing, housing, health, education, employment and access to community facilities, are fully integrated into all areas of local government policy and strategy.

2. Mainstreaming migrant integration into housing policy

- The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should develop specific policies that mainstream the integration of migrants into all aspects of housing policy.
- Local authority Housing Action Plans and Homeless Action Plans should include specific measures to promote integration of migrants.
- Annual reports on integration of migrants into housing policy should be presented to Housing Strategic Policy Committees.

3. Rights, Services & Standards

- Amendments are required to the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill to facilitate long-term residence rights for migrants, ensure that migrants and their families can be reunited, and that those migrants who are vulnerable to exploitation have opportunities to regularise their status if, through no fault of their own, they become undocumented.

- The National Employment Rights Agency (NERA) should enforce labour standards and the prevention of exploitation of migrant workers in the workplace.
- Local authority staff need training to accommodate ethnic diversity and opportunities for sharing and developing good practice approaches, and systems should be developed for collating data on ethnicity in housing allocations.
- Greater resources for local authority inspections in the private rented sector and for the enforcement of regulation of lettings should be made available.
- Measures should be taken to improve access to training and career opportunities for migrants by FÁS, and other training providers.
- No person should be denied access to emergency homelessness services on the grounds of HRC non-compliance.

4. Information & Consultation

- Local authorities, the Citizens Information Board, the Health Services Executive and other statutory agencies have key roles to play in working with and supporting local community groups, local area partnerships and NGOs working with migrants to source and provide information.
- Accessible information, translated into community languages, should be provided through the Citizens Information Board advocacy programme and the Citizens Information Centres.
- Local authorities and state agencies should facilitate regular consultation with migrant communities in order to identify needs and experiences, and to provide effective policy and service responses to these.
- Local communities should be resourced to participate in all aspects of the development and implementation of policy at a local and national level.
- Homeless services should collate data on migrants who are homeless and be resourced to provide the services that are required. The Homeless Agency has a key role to play, providing leadership in this area.
- A single, centralised electronic information resource should be developed to provide housing advice and support for migrants.

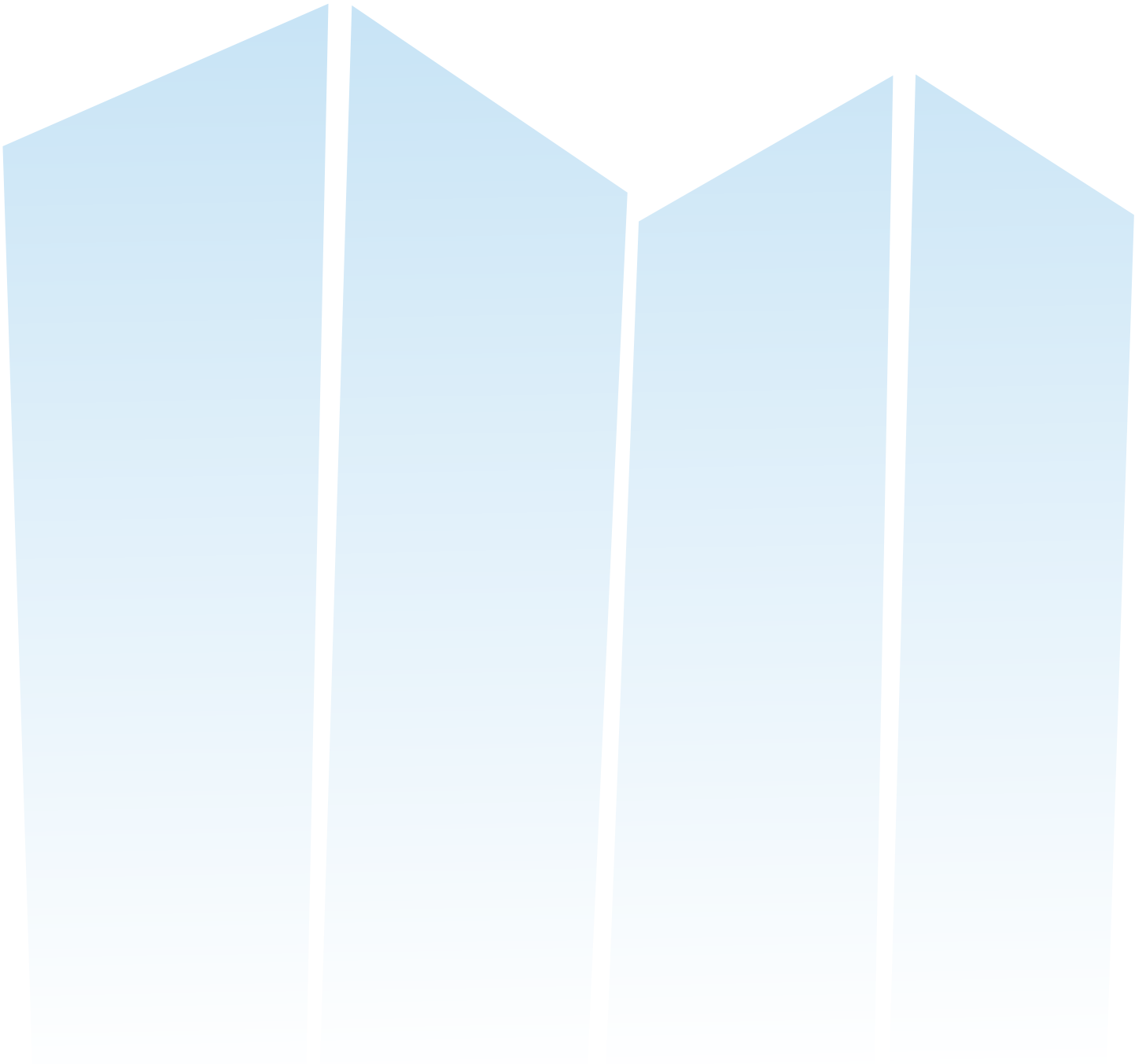
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Author Dr Jane Pillinger, Independent Researcher and Policy Advisor

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