

IRISH SOCIETY

# IMMIGRATION AND HOUSING IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND



Brian Portley

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*Brian Portley*

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## IRISH SOCIETY

The Irish Society series provides a critical, interdisciplinary and in-depth analysis of Ireland that reveals the processes and forces shaping social, economic, cultural and political life, and their outcomes for communities and social groups. The books seek to understand the evolution of social, economic and spatial relations from a broad range of perspectives, and explore the challenges facing Irish society in the future given present conditions and policy instruments.

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## Series editor's foreword

Over the past 20 years Ireland has undergone enormous social, cultural and economic change. From a poor, peripheral country on the edge of Europe with a conservative culture dominated by tradition and Church, Ireland transformed into a global, cosmopolitan country with a dynamic economy. At the heart of the processes of change was a new kind of political economic model of development that ushered in the so-called Celtic Tiger years, accompanied by renewed optimism in the wake of the ceasefires in Northern Ireland and the peace dividend of the Good Friday Agreement. As Ireland emerged from decades of economic stagnation and The Troubles came to a peaceful end, the island became the focus of attention for countries seeking to emulate its economic and political miracles. Every other country, it seemed, wanted to be the next Tiger, modelled on Ireland's successes. And then came the financial collapse of 2008, the bursting of the property bubble, bank bailouts, austerity plans, rising unemployment and a return to emigration. From being the paradigm case of successful economic transformation, Ireland has become an internationally important case study of what happens when an economic model goes disastrously wrong.

The Irish Society series provides a critical, interdisciplinary and in-depth analysis of Ireland that reveals the processes and forces shaping social, economic, cultural and political life, and their outcomes for communities and social groups. The books seek to understand the evolution of social, economic and spatial relations from a broad range of perspectives, and explore the challenges facing Irish society in the future given present conditions and policy instruments. The series examines all aspects of Irish society including, but not limited to: social exclusion, identity, health, welfare, life cycle, family life and structures, labour and work cultures, spatial and sectoral economy, local and regional development, politics and the political system, government and governance, environment, migration and spatial planning. The series is supported by the Irish Social Sciences Platform (ISSP), an all-island platform of integrated

social science research and graduate education focusing on the social, cultural and economic transformations shaping Ireland in the twenty-first century. Funded by the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, the ISSP brings together leading social science academics from all of Ireland's universities and other third-level institutions.

Given the marked changes in Ireland's fortunes over the past two decades it is important that rigorous scholarship is applied to understand the forces at work, how they have affected different people and places in uneven and unequal ways, and what needs to happen to create a fairer and prosperous society. The Irish Society series provides such scholarship.

Rob Kitchen

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# Housing pathways and policy

## Introduction

Ireland, as elsewhere, has witnessed an increase in immigration. The unprecedented economic boom that occurred between the mid-1990s and 2007/08 was associated with a reversal in Ireland's longstanding population decline or stagnation. Natural population growth contributed to this development and in addition, native emigration declined and immigration rates increased, with the latter being more significant. From 2002 to 2011 the proportion of migrants in Ireland increased from 5.9 to 12 percent of the total population (Central Statistics Office, 2012a). This strong net inward migration was principally stimulated by labour market shortages (Forfas, 2005). The increase in the ethnic and cultural mix in Ireland occurred over a relatively short period of time and in high volumes (Ruhs, 2003; Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2005). As a result, the level of Ireland's migrant population is comparable to many other Western European countries.

This book examines the lived housing experiences of these recently arrived migrants in Ireland. This is a study that relies on migrants' first-hand accounts of their housing experiences during the period commonly associated with Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom on the basis that increases in immigration coincided with and contributed to increases in house prices and private rents, on the one hand, and rising social housing need on the other. The purpose, therefore, is to assess if Ireland's housing system, characterised as over-heated and inelastic during this time, met migrants' accommodation needs. An adequate standard of housing also provides the foundation for migrants' social inclusion, which as a concept is somewhat ambiguous, but when linked to migrant housing is often initially expressed as the settlement process. In Ireland, the importance of housing in the settlement of migrants has been identified in a number of studies (Clann Housing Association, 1999; National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI), 2008; Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009), but the Irish

literature on this issue is significantly less developed than the international literature in a number of important respects. The relevant instalments in the Irish literature are relatively few in number and although the existing literature does provide evidence of the lived housing experience of migrants, the level of theoretical awareness in most studies is negligible, with the exception of the Focus Ireland and Immigrant Council of Ireland's (2009) housing pathways derived study of the housing experiences of Chinese, Indian, Lithuanian, and Nigerian migrants living in the Blanchardstown area of North West Dublin. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the lived housing experiences of migrants broadly conform to the patterns identified in the international social scientific literature.

In turn, this book is located within that body of more well-developed international social sciences literature. Of particular importance to the Irish case, is the view that across Europe and other western countries, migrants' housing conditions and housing market options are generally worse than those of natives (Özüekren and van Kempen, 2002). For instance, in the UK, Daley (1998) demonstrates that migrants, particularly black Africans, often reside in overcrowded dwellings in slum areas, reflecting their marginalised position within British society. Academic discourses also reveal that a disproportionate number of migrants tend to be represented in segments of housing systems denoted by less expensive and poor quality accommodation and that migrant communities tend to be clustered (Özüekren and van Kempen 2002). However, migrant groups and their housing situations are diverse (van Kempen and Özüekren, 1998) and not all will encounter housing disadvantage (Aalbers and Duerloo, 2003). Understanding the housing position of migrants, therefore, also requires consideration of wider social structures, including housing markets and national economies (Özüekren and van Kempen 2002). A key objective is to assess if migrant households residing in Ireland's housing system either follow or deviate from migrants' housing experiences as evidenced internationally

### **Towards a new approach**

An understated deficiency in the preceding discussion suggests an imperative exists to subject migrants' residential experiences to more theoretically grounded analysis. Housing studies has been criticised for its low level of theoretical awareness on the grounds that it impedes the development of explicit frameworks of analysis (Kemeny, 1992). Although the best housing scholarship has always sought to integrate social theory, this has not been accompanied by theoretical innovation (Jacobs *et al.*, 2004). As a result, housing researchers often employ methods drawn from the positivist tradition that are principally orientated towards the evidence gathering requirements of policy makers and

funders, and their interpretation of what constitutes 'evidence' (Jacobs *et al.*, 2004). This transmits into a housing research tradition that is often methodologically conservative, and characterised by the neglect of theory embedded in wider social research (Kemeny, 1992).

One attempt to overcome this shortcoming is posited by David Clapham (2005), who puts forward a way of looking at housing issues which he describes as the 'housing pathways approach'. As he states:

The concept of a pathway is offered as a way of ordering the housing field in a way that foregrounds the meanings held by households and the interactions that shape housing practices as well as emphasising the dynamic nature of housing experience and its interrelatedness with other aspects of household life (2005: 27).

It is built on the concept of a housing career, defined as the series of dwellings that a household occupies during its life-cycle (Özüekren and van Kempen, 2002). During housing careers households may wish to move to a preferred dwelling type or to a particular location. The decision to move is often framed in terms of constraints, such as lack of financial resources and in terms of opportunities, such as knowledge of the housing market. For instance, access to the housing market can be affected by issues such as welfare dependency, housing supply shortages particularly in neighbourhoods with large populations, and the legal status of the head of the household. The 'housing pathway approach' incorporates all the elements of the housing career approach, but also attempts to capture the social meanings associated with housing consumption across time and space.

As the analysis in this book is based primarily on migrants' views and perceptions, the 'housing pathways approach' breaks new ground in the housing studies field as it focuses on the experiences, interactions and behaviours of recently arrived migrants in Ireland in areas including the leaving home process, initial engagement with housing systems and residential mobility. In addition, placing migrants' interpretations of their experiences of housing pathways at the centre of the research process gives valuable insights into how they take control of their housing pathways through their ability to make choices as they adapt to life in Ireland. Immediately, this engages with mediating influences, such as identity and the factors that determine lifestyles. Importantly, the 'housing pathways approach' utilises migrants' subjectivity to assist policy makers to identify how housing policy influences people's behaviour, as housing policy can enable or prevent individuals and households from behaving in particular ways.

This book also locates the 'housing pathways approach' within debates concerning social research methodologies in a way that adds to the social scientific analytical toolkit, while also acknowledging the valuable contributions made by other authors, although, there is a fairly limited research literature where

the 'housing pathways approach' has been applied. In the United Kingdom, Clapham (2002) refers to the use of the pathways approach in homelessness studies conducted by Fitzpatrick (1999), in her study of homeless young people in Glasgow, and by Anderson and Tulloch (2000) in their review of homelessness literature. However, in these studies the pathways approach was relatively un-theorised and not related to the wider literature. Similarly, Robinson *et al.* (2007) provide an application in their study of the 'housing pathways approach' of new immigrants in Sheffield in the UK. In all of these cases, emphasis was placed on the behaviour of individuals and not on the structural factors that may have influenced their housing choices. However, more recently a number of studies have deployed the pathways approach to impressive effect. For instance, Netto (2011) assessed the usefulness of the pathways approach in a study of 32 refugees in Glasgow. This study demonstrated how the pathways approach can be used to identify the links between how refugees construct and negotiate identity, as they navigate their way through the housing system in Scotland. Another study that deploys the approach is that of Natalier and Johnson (2012). Here the authors track the experiences of 77 young people leaving state care in Australia. Their study demonstrates how examination of the inter-relationship between structure and agency can highlight differentiation between smooth and volatile housing pathways, where social networks have a mediating role. Therefore, a central aim of this book is to add to the body of Irish and international literature on migrant housing from this rarely used vantage point.

### **The vantage point**

My focus on migrants' lived housing experiences is primarily from a social policy vantage point. The analysis encompasses generalities inherent to immigration and housing policies, emphasising how broad regulatory mechanisms influences migrants' perception of specific issues, including matters related to the physical environment, migrants' arrival in Ireland, the relationship between employment practice and housing, migrants' capacity to meet their own housing costs and design preferences. With each of the following chapters representing a strand of analysis, the goal is to identify migrants' perceptions and attitudes, in terms of the meaning housing holds for them and how much control they can exercise over their consumption of housing.

The meaning of housing is difficult to define precisely, as migrants' perceptions of housing can be highly idiosyncratic, and may not find expression in terms of the social implications of wider public policies. For practical reasons, therefore, the boundaries of analysis in this book are drawn to include the immigration, housing, labour market, and welfare policies that constitute the backdrop to migrants' everyday lives in Ireland. From this perspective,

to evaluate migrants' meaning of home signifies consideration to regulatory practices, rules, values and beliefs, histories, discourses, and responses related explicitly to the distribution of housing for migrants, an acknowledgment of questions of integration and social cohesion, and an understanding of policy issues across statutory, as well as non-governmental agencies. In looking at the issues raised by this systematic examination of the choices and constraints that create migrants' housing pathways, this book works very much within the social policy tradition. Consequently, the discussion concentrates centrally on migrants' accounts of access and consumption of housing, rather than its production, but also highlights the structural factors that influence migrants' housing experiences.

### **Increased ethnic and cultural diversity**

In Ireland, increased ethnic and cultural diversity is on the agenda across the social sciences and within political discourses, surrounding migrants' daily practices with issues related to rights and governance. Ethnic and cultural diversity is very important to the analysis conducted in this book, as it refers or relates to distinctions between individuals or groups of migrants, to differences in perceptions related to personal and collective attributes, and to social, cultural, and identity divides that find expression in how migrants are conferred with the rights that govern their housing experiences. By taking account of migrants' experiences in this way, I am especially interested in migrants' personal circumstances, their living conditions, and the factors that facilitate or impede them from progressing through their housing pathways.

In ethnic and migrations studies, a customary approach to housing research takes into consideration issues of ethnicity, class, education, country of origin, and so forth. Comparatively, binary categories, including male/female, black/white, asylum seeker/refugee, and national/non-national are also deployed as categorical refinements that add to the social scientist's analytical toolkit, with a fuller acknowledgement of each enriching any exposé of migrants' housing. Clearly, however, these broad categories have limitations, when we consider migrant identities, experiences, social networks, or preferences as they relate to housing circumstances and especially among individual migrants and migrant groups that are few in number. There may be lines of similarity within as well as between assumptions around being, for instance, a black African person, or that Polish nationals living in Ireland are inclined towards solidarities rooted in nationality.

In this book, the most obvious implication is that overarching immigration and housing policy mechanisms, uniformly applied to migrants' administrative categories, result in a consistency of housing experiences that transcend

distinctions based on demographic variables associated with, for instance, ethnic or cultural background, religious affiliation, or age. This book examines the lived housing experiences of migrants living in inner city, town and small town locations, as selected to highlight how housing experiences differ at these localised levels. Although commonly found housing experiences do permeate their everyday lives in each location, variations in migrants' attributes related to immigration channels, legal status, ethnicity, preferences, and location do show us that in Ireland migrants are differentially active agents in housing and neighbourhood settings, which cannot always be read off from comparative categorical approaches.

### **The immigration policy environment**

Although in Ireland ethnic and cultural diversity is important, migrants' meaning of home and housing experiences are, nonetheless, strongly affected by an immigration policy environment, determined outside the household and neighbourhood. As a result, migrants' housing circumstances can be affected by the introduction of new laws/regulations, the influence of existing ones, often filtered through the requirements of open market forces. To provide an analytical backdrop, this book draws on the Census data outlining changes in migratory flows into Ireland, Irish immigration policies, and their relationship with migrants' housing experiences in Ireland. The paragraphs below provide that discussion, while later chapters deal more directly with migrants' housing experiences.

Table 1 disaggregates the nationalities of migrants to Ireland between 1996 and 2010. The figures reveal that in the period 1996–2002 approximately half of the migrants were returning Irish nationals. In fact, returning migrants rose from 17,700 in 1996 to a peak of 27,000 by 2002. However, from 1996 onwards the inward flows involved increasing numbers of non-Irish migrants. For instance, in 1996 migrants from outside the European Union and the United States of America constituted 10.7 percent of inflows, or 4,200 individuals. By 2003, the numbers of the migrants in this category had risen to 22,400.

Table 1 also shows that the most dramatic trend has been the large influx of migrants from the ten new European Union member states that acceded in 2004, followed by Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Their numbers increased from 34,100 in 2005 to 52,700 in 2007. The predominant trend more recently has been the increased numbers emigrating from Ireland, and consequent reduction in the migrant population. This shift is reflected in Table 1, which shows a steady decline in the net-inflows of all nationalities between 2008 and 2010, reflecting the worsening economic crisis in Ireland. This is markedly the case among nationals from the 12 new European Union member states whose numbers dropped from 33,700 in 2008 to just 5,800 in 2010.

**Table 1** Estimated immigration by nationality, 1996–2010 ('000s and %)

Year	Irish	UK	EU13*	EU16– 27	USA	Rest of World	Total
1996	17.7	8.3	5.0	–	4.0	4.2	39.2
	45.2	21.2	12.8	–	10.2	10.7	100
1997	20.8	8.4	5.5	–	4.2	5.5	44.4
	46.7	18.9	12.4	–	9.4	12.4	100
1998	24.3	8.6	6.1	–	2.3	4.7	46.0
	52.8	18.7	13.3	–	5.0	10.2	100
1999	26.7	8.2	6.9	–	2.5	4.5	48.8
	54.6	16.8	14.1	–	5.1	9.2	100
2000	24.8	8.4	8.2	–	2.5	8.6	52.5
	47.1	16	15.6	–	4.8	16.3	100
2001	26.3	9.0	6.5	–	3.7	13.6	59.1
	44.6	15.3	11.0	–	6.3	23.1	100
2002	27.0	7.4	8.1	–	2.7	21.7	66.9
	40.4	11.1	12.1	–	4.0	32.4	100
2003	17.6	9.1	8.8	–	2.1	22.4	60.0
	29.3	15.2	14.7	–	3.5	37.3	100
2004	16.7	7.4	13.3	–	2.3	18.8	58.5
	28.5	12.6	22.7	–	3.9	32.1	100
2005	18.5	8.9	9.3	34.1	2.1	11.6	84.5
	21.9	10.5	11.0	40.3	2.5	13.7	100
2006	18.9	9.9	12.7	49.9	1.7	14.7	107.8
	17.5	9.2	11.8	46.3	1.6	13.6	100
2007	20.0	5.9	10.4	52.7	2.8	17.8	109.6
	18.3	5.4	9.5	48.1	2.6	16.3	100
2008	16.2	7.0	8.6	33.7	2.0	16.3	83.8
	19.3	8.4	10.3	40.2	2.4	19.5	100
2009	18.4	4.4	8.6	13.5	1.1	11.3	57.3
	32.1	7.6	15.0	23.6	1.9	19.7	100
2010	13.3	2.4	4.3	5.8	0.3	4.6	30.7
	43.3	7.8	14.0	18.9	0.9	15.0	100

\* EU15 prior to 2004 accession excluding Ireland and the UK

Source: Central Statistics Office: *Population and Migration Estimates*, various years.

Table 2 provides more detailed analysis of the immigration trends of migrants between 2006 and 2011 and unlike the preceding table, is drawn from Census data, rather than population estimates. The figures provide a comparison of the numbers and percentages of persons usually resident in Ireland in 2006–11 classified by nationality. They show that the percentage of migrants increased marginally from 10.1 percent to 11.9 percent by 2011, with a total migrant population representing 199 different nationalities. This equates to some 544,357 migrants recorded living in Ireland in 2011, up from



**Table 2** Population by nationality, 2006–2011

	n	%	n	%
Irish	3,706,683	88.8	3,927,143	86.8
UK	112,548	2.7	112,259	2.5
European Union 13	42,693	1	48,280	1.1
European Union 10/12	120,534	2.9	226,225	5
Total European Union	284,440	6.6	386,764	8.5
Other European	24,425	0.6	16,307	0.4
American	21,124	0.3	24,884	0.5
African	35,326	0.8	41,642	0.9
Asian	46,952	1.1	65,579	1.4
Other nationalities	22,422	0.5	22,210	0.5
Multi/no nationality/not stated	47,955	1.1	54,621	1.2
Total Non-Irish	419,733	10.1	544,357	11.9
Total Non-European Union	150,249	3.4	170,622	3.8
Total	4,172,013	100	4,525,281	100

Figures detail only those resident and present on each Census night. Otherwise, the population total for 2006 is 4,239,848 rising to 4,588,252 by 2011.

Source: Central Statistics Office, Census 2011, and Economic and Social Research Institute, 2012.

419,733 in 2006. The Polish nationality had the largest increase during this period, and Polish residents increased from 63,276 persons in 2006 to 122,585 in 2011, a 59,309 increase between 2006 and 2011. In addition, Lithuanian residents increased by 12,055 persons in 2006 to stand at 36,683 by 2011. Other large increases over this period occurred in the number of Romanian, Indian, Latvian, and Hungarian nationals living in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2012a).

These figures provide the context for the idea of a policy environment that denotes factors which coordinate migrants’ housing choices, perceptions, and behaviours and frame their decisions. In terms of immigration policies, it refers to legislative factors and forces which influence outcomes and which provide supportive or restrictive opportunities for migrant actions towards their housing pathways. Since the 1990s, established ideas surrounding nationality were challenged when Ireland’s status as a mono-ethnic country of emigration transformed into one associated with the increased proportion of migrants living in Ireland. The need for migrant workers, prompted by high economic growth and an increase in asylum seekers, due to global conflict, led to increases in the number and cultural diversity of arrivals. In response, discourses surrounding migration initially focused on asylum seekers over concerns that their number would put the welfare state under strain. Prior to 1994 the number of asylum applications was quite low. However, in the period 1994 to 2002 the rate of