

From Direct Provision to Housing: A Qualitative Study of the Housing Journeys of Refugees in Ireland

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Social Work and Social Policy
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2024

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27 September 2023

Summary

This thesis examines the housing journeys of refugees in Ireland, with a particular focus on the transition from Direct Provision to housing. In Ireland and elsewhere, a significant body of literature has examined refugees' experiences of living in reception centres and of accessing housing once they gain status. The point of leaving reception centres has been identified as a critical juncture in refugees' housing journeys. To date, however, limited attention has been paid to how refugees navigate and make sense of the transition between these two distinct fields of housing, including the strategies they deploy in the search for housing.

Initiated in 2018, this research was conducted at a time of significant policy change in relation to refugee reception conditions in Ireland. In 2018, asylum seekers were granted the right to work and, since 2019, two housing Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been tasked with supporting refugees as they transition from DP to housing. While these changes might be expected to improve refugees' access routes to secure housing, an escalating housing crisis has produced new challenges of access to affordable private rented accommodation.

Underpinned by a constructivist epistemology, this research utilised a combination of in-depth interviewing and the ethnographic approach of the 'Go-Along', which involves the researcher and participant walking together and talking in a less formal way about experience, place, perspectives and meanings. Twenty-two refugees from across Ireland, including ten women and twelve men who had gained status within the past ten years, were recruited through social media and with the help of NGOs and volunteers working directly with refugees in Dublin and a number of provincial locations countrywide. While qualitative interviewing provided access to the perspectives and meaning-making strategies of participants, the ethnographic Go-along permitted the study of social practice and place. This use of method triangulation produced a nuanced understanding of the case under study.

Mobilising Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*, particularly the concepts of field, capital and practice, enabled an in-depth understanding of refugees' transition from DP to housing. The analysis revealed that while staying in DP, some participants succeeded in improving their accommodation situation by drawing on social links (e.g. to General Practitioners or solicitors). Furthermore, participants developed practices in order to avoid and/or resist the system of control that operated within DP. While the superdiverse field of DP at times produced conflicts and tensions, DP also provided a network of close and weak ties, offering participants access to information and practical support.

Although gaining refugee status brought feelings of relief associated with having finally escaped a prolonged period of marginalisation, it also led to a sense of fatigue arising from the

challenges they had endured during the time spent in DP. In addition, the transition from DP to mainstream welfare provision meant that participants had to acquire a new form of administrative capital in order to successfully navigate this new bureaucratic field. Low affordability and housing market discrimination, combined with labour market exclusion during the asylum process, meant that they occupied a disadvantaged position in the private rental market. Social networks emerged as critical enabler for refugees in acquiring the navigational cultural capital necessary to develop and adapt their housing search practices, which, for a large number, involved concealing their economic situation and/or social identity, persuading landlords of their deservingness, adapting or lowering their expectations and searching for accommodation by drawing on co-ethnic networks and social links with NGOs.

Detailed analysis of the paths followed by participants in the search for housing revealed that a majority followed linear housing journeys when attempting to secure accommodation in the private rental market with the Housing Assistance Payment, through either direct or NGO-mediated contact with estate agents and/or landlords. A smaller group followed a turbulent housing journey, having accessed numerous insecure, temporary accommodations through their social networks, and leading some into situations of hidden or literal homelessness. Overall, housing insecurity, coupled with highly constrained access to social housing and/or homeownership, meant that refugee households struggled to find secure, permanent housing.

Refugees' perceptions of the private rental market were shaped by their experience of DP: they linked the transition from DP to housing to reclaiming control over their day-to-day lives, finding peace, and regaining a sense of normality. Yet, leaving the familiar field of DP behind simultaneously triggered feelings of insecurity, doubt and alienation. In response to ongoing housing insecurity, refugees adapted their practices by prioritising rental payments, striving to be 'good' tenants and delaying entry to the labour market in order to avoid the loss of housing and other welfare supports. Ongoing housing insecurity, characterised by frequent residential moves, also undermined their home-making practices and their ability to maintain connections with friends and neighbours.

The findings of this research highlight the importance of taking an integrated approach to understanding refugees' housing journeys. The thesis concludes by setting out policy recommendations that highlight the importance of locating refugees' housing needs within mainstream housing policy.

Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank the women and men who shared their stories and reflections as part of this study. I deeply appreciate each conversation, walk and dish we shared during the course of this research. Without you, this work would not have been possible. I would also like to acknowledge the volunteers and professionals who took the time to share their knowledge and who supported me in recruiting participants. Special thanks go to Stephen and the gang from the *Practical Language Service*, Louise, as well as the *Ireland Says Welcome* group for supporting my research and keeping me sane during the pandemic.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Paula Mayock, who has given me the opportunity to work on a topic that is close to my heart. I highly value the mentorship you gave me during these years, in sharing with me your expertise in qualitative research, providing detailed feedback on each chapter, and supporting applications for research funding.

I want to thank my family for their unwavering support during this time. My mum, Lydia Bieri, for always believing in me and for taking me on breath-taking hikes whenever I visit home. To my sister, Isabelle Frei, her husband Patrick, and their three children Ivar, Jonna and Yuri for all the love and joy they bring to my life. My sister Miriam Bieri, for her poise and her visits to Ireland. My late father Beat Bieri for sparking an interest in politics and social justice in me. My uncles Turtur and Remo for spoiling me rotten whenever I visit Appenzell. And finally, my in-laws, Shashi and Jagdish Mehta as well as my sister in-law Vini Mehta, and her children Amy and Ani, thank you for welcoming me into your family.

I deeply value the support I received and the friendships I made through the PhD community at 30 Anglesea Street. Amy, Bao, Courtney, Calvin, Danielle, Ivana, Katharine, Mary, Natalie, Sarah P and many more – thank you for all the conversations, words of encouragement and reading of drafts over the years. Thank you also to Máiréad, Sari and Bridget for your feedback on drafts, to Shepherd for your weird sense of humour, to Nauman, Siddra, and Alizeh for the great times in Cork, and Orla, Stephanie, and Alex for being such supportive colleagues.

A big thank you goes to my unofficial second supervisor, Dr. Rakesh Mehta. You keep me going with your unceasing encouragement, wisdom, and love.

Lastly, I also want to thank the TCD Immigration Initiative, the TCD School of Social Work and Social Policy and the Irish Research Council for providing funding at different stages of this PhD journey. Without funding this research would not have been possible.

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Abbreviations

B&B	Bed and Breakfast Accommodation
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
DASS	Directorate of Asylum Seeker Services
DP	Direct Provision
DPCs	Direct Provision Centres
EEA	European Economic Area
EROC	Emergency and Orientation Centres
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
GA	Go-Along
GNIB	Garda National Immigration Bureau
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
INIS	Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Service
IPO	International Protection Office
IRPP	Irish Refugee Protection Programme
MASI	Movement for Asylum Seekers in Ireland
ORAC	Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
PPS	Personal Public Service
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
SWA	Supplementary Welfare Assistance
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States

1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the housing experiences of refugees who have come to Ireland to seek international protection. Underpinned by a social constructivist perspective, the research takes a qualitative case study approach to examine the lived experiences of families and individuals attempting to make a home in Ireland after living in situations of protracted displacement. At the onset of the study, in summer 2018, Ireland had just opted into the *EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive* (2013), which requires the Irish state to fundamentally rethink its current approach to accommodating people fleeing from war and persecution.

In Ireland, a growing body of literature has examined the experiences of asylum seekers living in state-provided accommodation. Yet, less is known about refugees' experiences and practices once they gain status and move into the community. This study, therefore aimed to further our understanding of how the legal transition from asylum seeker to refugee impacts the experience of securing accommodation, accessing housing and finding a sense of home. The main aim of this research was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the housing experiences of refugee families and individuals as they transition from the highly uncertain and marginalised period of seeking asylum to being granted status with enhanced access to housing, welfare and employment rights. To gain a nuanced understanding of refugees' diverse experiences during their transition from state-provided asylum accommodation to social and/or private rented accommodation in the community once they gain status, family and single households from 13 countries were recruited as research participants in Ireland. Initiated in October 2019, data were collected through a combination of in-depth interviews and the ethnographic 'Go-Along' method.

This chapter provides a historical and political background to the study. First, it summarises the evolution of the asylum system in Ireland and the policy of Direct Provision (DP), including its position in the broader European policy landscape. The chapter then outlines the changes that emerged in Ireland's asylum policy between 2015 and 2020 before discussing the policies that impact the transition from DP to independent housing and what is currently known about refugees' experiences of this transition. The chapter concludes by outlining the content of the dissertation.

1.1. Making a Home after A Decade of Displacement

In 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded 79.5 million people who had been forcibly displaced due to violence, conflict and persecution (UNHCR, 2020). Since 2011, conflicts in several countries, such as Syria, South Sudan, Myanmar and Venezuela, have forced millions of people to leave their homes in search of protection. The number of displaced people has increased steadily, prompting the UNHCR to describe the period from 2011 to 2019 as “A Decade of Displacement” (UNHCR, 2020). While most refugees were internally displaced, some sought refuge in neighbouring countries (UNHCR, 2020). Only a fraction of the people experiencing forced displacement globally seek asylum in Europe (UNHCR, 2020); however, their arrival and presence are often highly politicised (Fanning and Mutwarasibo, 2007; Lentin, 2007; Lukes et al., 2019; Zetter, 2007).

In 2015 and 2016, during what is now commonly referred to as the European ‘refugee crisis’, the number of people seeking asylum in Europe – many arriving by sea – peaked at 1.3 million annually (European Council, 2023). The refugee crisis revealed the limits of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) by testing the solidarity of EU member states, thus triggering a review of current asylum policies at both national and European levels (Niemann and Zaun, 2018). Although Ireland did not experience a dramatic increase in asylum applications at that time,¹ this refugee crisis triggered a period of fundamental policy change. For instance, Ireland introduced the *International Protection Act 2015*, which established a new single application procedure for international protection applicants intending to increase the efficiency of the process (Arnold et al., 2018).

The refugee crisis of 2015-2016 also led to renewed academic interest in the housing experiences of refugees in Europe. A growing body of literature examining reception conditions during the asylum process revealed that the provision of institutionalised, dispersed and poor-quality accommodation restricted refugees’ autonomy and exacerbated their marginalisation and stigmatisation within communities (Hartmann, 2019; Kreichauf, 2018; O’Reilly, 2018; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019). Therefore, gaining status and moving from state-provided accommodation to the social and/or private rental

¹ Reasons for the comparatively low number of asylum applications in Ireland are the country’s geographical distance from the major migration routes, as well as Ireland’s border control policy which has seen an increasing number of non-EEA citizens being turned away at (air)ports, hindering them from seeking asylum (Fagan 2018, cited in Lentin 2018).

market was identified as a critical juncture in refugees' housing journeys (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Foreman and Ní Raghallaigh, 2019; Netto, 2011a). Despite the centrality of housing to refugee integration (Ager and Strang, 2008; Phillips, 2006), a growing body of international research has shown that refugees face numerous barriers when attempting to access adequate and secure accommodation. In countries including Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany, and Austria, large numbers of refugee households have been found to experience overcrowded and poor-quality housing situations and homelessness, with negative consequences for their physical and mental health, their financial situation and their sense of belonging (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Netto, 2011b; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; Strang et al., 2018; Ziersch et al., 2017).

1.2. Irish Policy Landscape

National asylum and housing policy contexts have a significant impact on refugees' housing journeys (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Kissoon, 2010). This section outlines the Irish policy landscape in relation to reception conditions for asylum seekers as well as the transition from DP to housing once they gain status. Before considering the development of Ireland's asylum policy in detail, this section starts by briefly introducing the international policy context

1.2.1. Ireland's Asylum Policy in the 1990s

On the 28th of July 1951, the United Nations adopted the *Convention Relating To The Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention)* in Geneva, which addressed the rights of people who had been displaced during the Second World War. This document defined a refugee as a person who has a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” and who is residing outside of their country of nationality (Convention Relating To The Status of Refugees [Refugee Convention], 1951). It further outlined refugees' access to basic rights in host countries, including their right to employment and adequate housing. While the convention initially only applied to people who had experienced displacement before 1951, the *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1967) removed these temporal and geographical limitations. Both documents remain valid today and were reaffirmed in September 2016 through the adoption of the *New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants by the UN General Assembly*.²

² The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was adopted on September 19th 2016 as a response to increased mobility by migrants and refugees. The declaration outlined a comprehensive

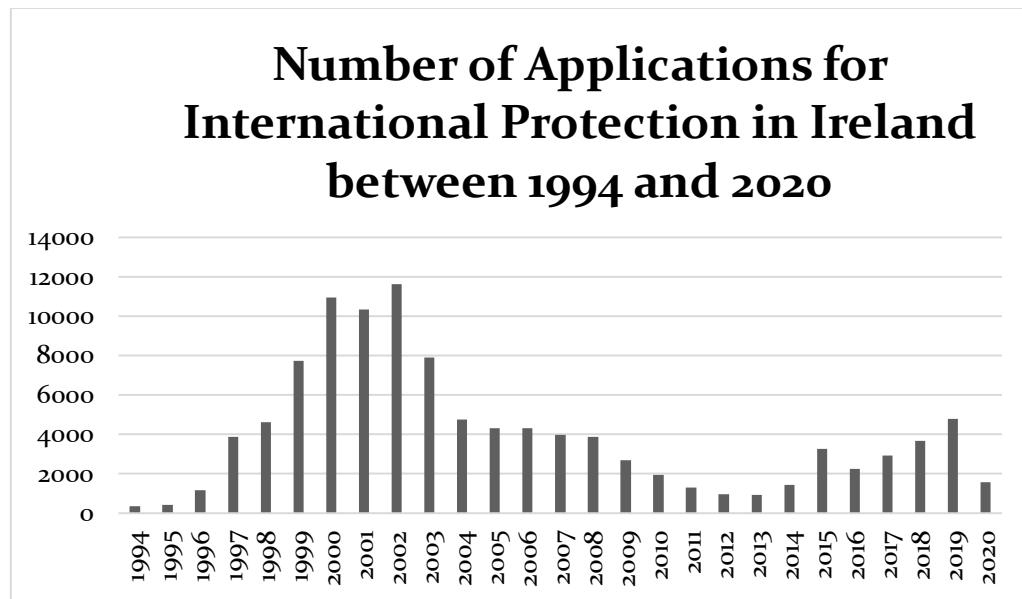
During the 1950s and 1960s, many liberal democracies (including several Western European countries, the UK, the US and Australia) were favourably disposed to receiving migrants, including refugees, because labour was needed to sustain extensive economic growth³ (Gibney, 2004). However, these governments' favourable attitudes towards labour migration weakened alongside the severe economic recessions during the 1970s, which significantly reduced the demand for new labour (Gibney, 2004). Conversely, Ireland struggled with a weak economy and ongoing emigration patterns throughout this period and, as a result, accepted a relatively small number of programme refugees between 1954 and 1992 (Fanning, 2021; V. Sheridan, 2023).

After decades of recessions and high unemployment during the early 1990s, the Irish Government introduced an extensive neoliberal programme of economic de-regularisation to attract Foreign Direct Investments (Kitchin et al., 2012). This programme resulted in a period of dramatic economic growth between 1993 and 2007, commonly referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger' era. Ireland's economic success turned the country into a popular destination for labour migrants, returning emigrants and asylum seekers (Hughes and Quinn, 2004; Sexton, 2003).

refugee response framework which can be adopted in situations where there is a large movement of refugees. Further, the declaration gave a clear mandate to work towards a Global Compact on Refugees, a non-binding framework, which was affirmed on December 27th 2018 and strives towards greater burden sharing among the international community (Triggs & Wall, 2020).

³ Another contributing factor was the Cold War: liberal democracies often viewed refugees from Communist countries as representing living proof of the Communist regimes' shortcomings and were thus more welcoming towards them (Gibney, 2004).

Figure 1 Number of Applications for International Protection in Ireland between 1994 and 2020



(Sources: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner [1994-2016]; Day [2020]; and International Protection Office [2021])

The strong economic growth during the 1990s was a contributing factor to the growing number of people seeking asylum in Ireland from 1997 to 2003, as shown in Figure 1. Yet, there were other factors, such as the Yugoslavian wars, which forced millions of people to flee their homes (Ward, 1998). Irish Government officials also suspected that political developments in the UK further added to the increase in applications: in the 1990s, the UK intensified its policy of deterrence by denying asylum seekers access to welfare payments and homelessness services, which may have led to more people seeking asylum in Ireland (Ward, 1998).

The growth in asylum applications coincided with widening inequality in Ireland. This became most evident in the Irish housing market. Homeownership has been a central tenet of Ireland's welfare state and, by 1991, 80% of the households lived in owner-occupied accommodation (Norris, 2016). By contrast, local authority and private rental accommodation played a marginalised role in 1991 (Memery, 2001). The dramatic increase in housing and rental prices that coincided with the economic boom meant that many households could no longer afford high rental costs or secure mortgages, with more and more people pushed out of the private housing market (Memery, 2001). As the diminished stock of local authority housing was not able to meet the growing housing need, the number of people experiencing homelessness increased rapidly (O'Sullivan, 1997). The

housing crisis in the 1990s meant that newly arriving asylum seekers faced significant barriers when attempting to secure housing. Their economic situation was especially bleak since Irish Government policy did not permit them to work, start a business or access higher education (Loyal and Quilley, 2016). This exclusion from the labour market forced people to depend on Supplementary Welfare Assistance (SWA) and rent supplements. As a result, most struggled to find affordable housing in the private rental market (O'Sullivan, 1997).

With no designated accommodation in place for people seeking asylum, many new arrivals experienced homelessness. Health Boards⁴ played a central role in accommodating homeless asylum seekers (Loyal and Quilley, 2016). However, these services soon struggled to accommodate the increasing number of new arrivals and, in 1997, more than half of the households staying in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation were in the asylum process, with the length of their stay in homelessness accommodation increasing (O'Sullivan, 1997). This increased demand placed significant pressure on an already strained homeless service system and, eventually, contributed to a deterioration of service quality, fuelling tensions between Irish people and asylum seekers living in shared shelters (O'Sullivan, 1997).

Ireland's lack of preparedness for the increase in asylum applications was not only evident in its highly constrained ability to accommodate new arrivals but also in relation to the asylum process itself. Until 1996, Ireland did not have a national law governing the asylum process and the *Alien's Act 1935* was employed to deal with asylum applications. Although Ireland signed the *1951 Refugee Convention* in 1956, it failed for more than forty years to integrate the convention into national law. The growing number of asylum applications finally compelled the Irish Government to legislate on the matter, leading to the introduction of the *Refugee Act 1996*.

Similar to media discourses in other jurisdictions, the discourse in Ireland towards asylum seekers during the 1990s became increasingly hostile and frequently portrayed asylum seekers as taking advantage of the welfare system (M. J. Breen et al., 2005). In their

⁴ The Irish Government established Health Boards in 1971 to provide acute and community healthcare. Under the *Health Act 1953*, these Health Boards were also obliged to provide shelter and assistance to people experiencing homelessness. Health Boards were subsumed into the Health Executive Services (HSE) in 2005.

analysis of print media articles on asylum seekers published in 2002, M. J. Breen et al. (2005) note “the biased, ignorant and racist tone of much of the Irish print media discourse” (p.18). Similar to political discourses in the UK (Bloch and Schuster, 2002; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010), access to welfare and housing was increasingly framed as a ‘pull-factor’, which had to be avoided at all costs (Atkins, 2015; Loyal and Quilley, 2016; Thornton, 2014). This othering discourse laid the groundwork for the Irish Government to introduce legislation that would deny basic human rights and equal access to welfare to people seeking international protection for many years.

1.2.2. *The Policy of Direct Provision and Dispersal*

In November 1999, the then Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, John O'Donoghue, informed the public of the Government's intention to introduce a system of DP for people seeking asylum. To implement this policy change, the Directorate of Asylum Seeker Services (DASS) was established in 1999. Shortly afterwards, in April 2000, a ministerial circular officially introduced the policy of DP. This policy replaced welfare payments with the direct provision of shelter, food, basic healthcare and a small weekly allowance⁵ (C. Breen, 2008; Loyal and Quilley, 2016; Thornton, 2007). Coinciding with the introduction of the system of DP, a policy of dispersal was introduced and, in 1999, the DASS⁶ started to contract private businesses⁷ to accommodate asylum seekers across the country. The accommodation provided was often of poor standard, comprising of disused guesthouses, holiday homes and hotels as well as former convents which were not suitable for long-term accommodation. Initially, the Irish Government intended to accommodate asylum seekers for a period of six months in the DP system while they awaited a decision on their application for international protection (B. McMahon, 2015, p.14). However, owing to the lengthy asylum process, many ended up staying in Direct Provision Centres (DPCs) for far longer. Until 2018, when Ireland opted into the *EU Reception Conditions Directive*

⁵ This change was enabled by section 171 of the *Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act, 1993*, which permitted the Government to provide welfare not only in cash but also as benefit in kind (Breen 2008). The newly introduced allowance of Euro 19.10 per adult and Euro 9.60 per child, paid by the Department of Social Protection, remained unchanged between 2000 to 2018.

⁶ DASS was replaced in 2001 by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA). RIA remained responsible for the operation of the Direct Provision system until 2019 when the newly established International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) took over responsibility for accommodating asylum seekers.

⁷ A Freedom of Information request revealed that the Department of Justice paid 1.36 billion euro to private contractors between 2001 and 2019, turning DP into a lucrative business (Hilliard, 2019). The privatisation of asylum accommodation is not unique to Ireland and has also been observed in the UK (Darling, 2016).

(Department of Justice and Equality, 2019), the policies of DP and Dispersal were based solely on a ministerial circular published in 2000. As a result, the policy of DP lacked a statutory base which prevented parliamentary oversight for almost 20 years (Atkins, 2015; Thornton, 2014). While in some European countries, including Germany and Belgium, the dispersal of asylum seekers is strictly calculated based on the population size of each region (Adam et al., 2019; Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022), in Ireland, the availability of low-cost accommodation appears to be the main driver in determining dispersal locations. Several scholars have noted that limited consideration is given to the availability of local infrastructures – including schools and healthcare provision – when identifying new locations for dispersal (Arnold et al., 2018; Ní Chiosáin, 2019; Pieper et al., 2011).

The Irish Government has claimed that the main reason for the introduction of the DP system in 1999 was that “[t]he homeless service of the then Eastern Health Board could not cope and there was a serious prospect of widespread homelessness among asylum seekers” (Reception and Integration Agency, 2020). However, while the risk of homelessness among asylum seekers certainly played a role, this was not the only factor underlying the introduction of the policy of DP and Dispersal. Due to the Common Travel Area, Ireland’s immigration and border control policies were closely aligned with those operating in the UK. It is, therefore, not surprising that when the UK introduced a range of restrictive asylum laws in the 1990s – effectively establishing a dispersal system and replacing most of the welfare supports with vouchers and benefits-in-kind (Bloch, 2000) – the Irish Government followed suit in establishing the system of DP and Dispersal, arguing that not to do so would create a ‘pull-factor’ (C. Breen, 2008; Loyal and Quilley, 2016; Reception and Integration Agency, 2010; Thornton, 2014). As early as 2001, a study by Fanning et al. (2001) highlighted the poor conditions asylum seekers had to endure in these new accommodation centres. These included a lack of privacy due to chronic overcrowding, which led to severe stress and conflicts between residents, and the provision of inadequate food, leading to malnutrition and ill-health in both adults and children (Fanning et al., 2001).

With the aim of harmonising the reception of people seeking asylum in Europe, the EU introduced the *Reception Conditions Directive* in 2003, which outlined minimum standards concerning the reception of asylum seekers. Even though the Directive allowed for considerable discretion (Dörrenbächer and Mastenbroek, 2019), Ireland opted out of the Directive, alongside the UK and Denmark. Ireland justified its decision by claiming that opting in would create a ‘pull-factor’ since the Directive required countries to

introduce a limited right to work (Atkins, 2015). Instead, the Irish Government introduced further legislation to restrict access to welfare, for instance, by denying asylum seekers access to child benefits. As Irish Government policy forbid asylum seekers to work and provided only minimal social welfare support, asylum seekers were effectively forced to live a life of state-imposed poverty⁸ (Arnold, 2012; C. Breen, 2008; Fanning and Veale, 2004). The introduction of DP and subsequent reductions in welfare provisions thus represent an example of how social policy is sometimes instrumentalised for migration control (Tervonen et al., 2018; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019).

The policy of DP established a system of control and surveillance as DPC managers and staff imposed strict curfews and mealtimes; installed CCTV and introduced sign in/sign out sheets to record residents' movements; and permitted staff to conduct unannounced room inspections (Hewson, 2022; Loyal and Quilley, 2016). In addition to the control exerted over DP residents' everyday lives, they were deprived of meaningful activity in that they were not allowed to work or cook. This severe loss of autonomy and freedom had significant negative consequences for people's mental health and eroded their meaning of life (Higgins et al., 2019; O'Reilly, 2018). The institutionalised nature of DP, combined with the severe financial hardship endured by residents, also made it impossible for asylum seekers to lead a normal family life (AkiDwA, 2010; Arnold, 2012; Atkins, 2015; Fanning et al., 2001; Moran et al., 2019; Ogbu et al., 2014).

Further barriers to immigration and citizenship were introduced by the Irish Government alongside the introduction of the DP system. Since the foundation of the Free State in 1922, the Irish constitution and ensuing legislation had guaranteed the right to citizenship by birth (*jus soli*) in Ireland. The case *Fajujonu v Minister for Justice* in 1990 ruled that, under certain circumstances, parents can gain residency based on their child's nationality. Pursuant to this case, an increasing number of parents applied for residency based on their child's citizenship, peaking at 6,000 applications in 2001 (Mullally, 2005, p.583). However, the emergence of an increasingly racist and xenophobic public debate in the 1990s accused women of giving birth to children with the sole aim of gaining residency in Ireland (Lentin, 2013). This discourse provided the backdrop to a Citizenship referendum, which was held in 2004, with an overwhelming majority (79.17%) of Irish citizens supporting the abolition of the *jus soli* principle in favour of the *jus sanguinis*.

⁸ In Ireland the reduced welfare payments paid to asylum seekers amounted to less than 16% of the poverty line in 2001 (Fanning and Veale, 2004).

This meant that citizenship was no longer conferred on the principle of being born on Irish territory (*jus soli*), but rather based on one's lineage or descent from citizens of Ireland (*jus sanguinis*) (Mullally, 2005).

Ireland's asylum system was therefore becoming increasingly hostile towards newly arriving people seeking international protection. The policy of DP and Dispersal, as well as the introduction of restricted citizenship rights, aimed to deter the arrival of new asylum seekers. The numbers of new asylum applications peaked in 2002 and decreased thereafter. However, it is difficult to establish whether this decline is attributable solely to these policies or in part the result of a general decline in asylum applications across Europe (European Council, 2023). Importantly, despite the fact that the number of applications for international protection peaked in 2002, the number of people living in DP continued to grow due to the protracted decision-making process on asylum applications (Loyal and Quilley, 2016). Consequently, the number of people living in DP peaked six years later, in 2008, with 6,850 asylum seekers recorded as accommodated in 65 DP centres across the country (Loyal and Quilley, 2016). Following the global financial crisis in 2008, the number of asylum applications decreased further. The decreasing number of applications in combination with the introduction of severe austerity measures led the Department of Justice to reduce the number of DP centres significantly and, by 2016, there were only 33 centres remaining with a total capacity of 5,230 and occupancy of 4,425 residents (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019).

1.2.3. *The EU Refugee Crisis and its Impact on Irish Asylum Policy*

The refugee crisis of 2015-2016 had a major impact on Ireland's asylum policies despite the fact that, initially, it led to only a modest increase in applications for international protection. At the height of the crisis, the Irish Government introduced the *International Protection Act 2015* which officially commenced on December 31st, 2016, replacing the *Refugee Act 1996*. The main aim of this Act was to accelerate the application process by introducing a Single Application Procedure for all applicants⁹ (Arnold et al., 2018). In line with international law, the Act defined a refugee as:

⁹ The *International Protection Act 2015* brought further changes, for instance, in replacing the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) with the newly established International Protection Office (IPO) which forms part of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS). Furthermore, the Act replaced the Refugee Appeals Tribunal with the International Protection Appeals Tribunal.

“[...] a person who cannot return to their own country for fear of persecution based on either their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or because they belong to a particular social group (for example, due to their sexual orientation). A person who is eligible for subsidiary protection is not a refugee but does face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their own country” (Department of Justice and Equality, 2018, p.24).

However, the most significant change brought about by the *International Protection Act 2015* related to the matter of family reunification. Family reunification offers refugees a safe and legal option to reunite with family members who live in other countries. Prolonged separations from family are often traumatic, as affected individuals worry about family members left behind (Hinds, 2018). While the *Refugee Act 1996* contained a broad definition of family, taking into account all dependent family members, the *International Protection Act 2015* only allows for reunification with members of the nuclear family¹⁰ (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), 2018, p.14-15).

In response to the 2015-16 refugee crisis, the Irish Government further established two programmes with the aim of resettling refugees to Ireland (Arnold et al., 2018). The first, the Syrian Humanitarian Admission Programme (SHAP)¹¹, facilitated Syrians living in Ireland to bring their families there. This programme lasted for two months and approved 119 family members (out of 308 applications) to move to Ireland (Arnold et al., 2018). The second programme was the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP) in which the Irish Government pledged to welcome 4,000 refugees through a mix of relocation and resettlement schemes. Some refugees arriving under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme were accommodated in Emergency and Orientation Centres (EROCs), which were specifically established for the reception of refugees arriving via the resettlement and relocation schemes, while others were accommodated within the existing system of DP (Arnold et al., 2018).

Although the Irish Refugee Protection Programme was welcomed by many advocates in civil society, it has also been criticised for introducing a ‘two-tier system’;

¹⁰ The new definition of family eligible for reunification only includes parents if the sponsor is a minor when applying for asylum; spouses and civil partners are included if married at the time of the asylum application, and children only if they were minor at the time of the asylum application. This meant that grandparents and grandchildren, siblings and parents of adult applicants, as well as guardians and wards who were covered under the previous act were now excluded (IHREC, 2018, p.14-15).

¹¹ This was programme was open for two months.

specifically, refugees seeking international protection in Ireland experience significant disparities with regards to reception conditions and integration supports depending on their mode of arrival, with direct consequences for their housing situations (Arnold et al., 2021; Arnold et al., 2018; Kinlen, 2011; Pestova, 2017). While people who organise their own travel to Ireland are typically accommodated for lengthy periods in DPCs and receive limited support once they are granted status, people who arrive through the IRPP have access to tailored integration supports and, in some instances, access to local authority housing (Arnold et al., 2021).

While the European refugee crisis of 2015-2016 triggered a period of considerable policy change in Ireland, there had been considerable pressure on the Government to change its policy approach before the onset of this crisis. When, in 2014, Ms Frances Fitzgerald took office as the new Minister for Justice, asylum seekers in Ireland organised themselves and held protests across eight DPCs to demand the right to work, the abolition of DP and an amnesty for all residents. Alongside these protests, the Movement for Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI) was established and, since that time, has represented asylum seekers across Ireland and continuously called for their equal access to rights and an end to DP (Lentin, 2015).

The mounting pressure prompted the then Minister of State with responsibility for New Communities, Culture and Equality, Mr Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, and the Minister of the Department of Justice and Equality, Ms Frances Fitzgerald, to establish a working group under the leadership of Brian McMahon. The newly founded working group was tasked with drafting recommendations to make the asylum process more dignified, to improve the DP system and to provide additional supports to people seeking asylum. However, the working group was clearly instructed to only discuss improvements rather than alternatives to the current system (B. McMahon, 2015). The recommendations of the McMahon report, in combination with the relentless advocacy work on the part of MASI and various civil society groups, placed significant pressure on the Government to abolish or at least reform the existing asylum system, leading to a period of significant change.

One important recommendation of the McMahon report was that independent living, including access to cooking facilities and own-door accommodation, be provided within the DP system. Up until that point this was only offered in a small number of DPCs. The Department of Justice started to implement this recommendation in early 2017 and, by early 2019, 2,422 (of 7,016) residents were living 'independently' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). The McMahon report further recommended the introduction of an

independent complaint procedure and, since 2018, the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Children have handled DP residents' complaints. This independent complaints procedure has led to the publication of a number of reports highlighting the issues faced by people living in DP, such as lack of cooking and childcare facilities, arguments with centre staff and denied transfers to other locations (Ombudsman, 2018, 2019, 2020; Ombudsman for Children, 2020).

In addition, the McMahon report (2015) also stressed that not having the right to work posed a major barrier to asylum seekers' full participation in Irish society. Subsequently, in May 2017, the Irish Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the working ban outlined in the *International Protection Act 2015* was unconstitutional.¹² Under considerable pressure, the Irish Government conceded to this ruling in July 2018 and introduced the right to work¹³ for people seeking asylum in Ireland (Lentin, 2018). By June 2019, 1,229 people in the asylum process had started to work (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). Concurrent with introducing the right to work, the Irish Government also opted into the *EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive* in 2018, by introducing the *Reception Conditions Regulations* (S.I. No. 230/2018), marking the first time that the system of DP in Ireland was placed on a statutory footing (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). To incorporate the Directive into national legislation, the Department of Justice published the *National Standards for Accommodation Centres* in August 2019 (Department of Justice, 2020). At the time of writing, the implementation of these standards is an ongoing process.

The most fundamental change to the DP system was proposed with the formation of a new Government in 2020 and the publication on June 15th of the *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future*, which stated that the Government was “[c]ommitted to

¹² The Supreme Court gave the Irish Government six months to introduce a right to work for asylum seekers. The Irish Government, however, showed reluctance to lift the working ban in place by initially applying for a six-month extension and ultimately failing to present a solution within the extended period. The Supreme Court formally declared in February 2018 that the working ban for asylum seekers was unconstitutional. As a result of the ruling, the Irish Government introduced temporary guidelines, which allowed asylum seekers access to work based on the same regulations as non-EEA nationals. These regulations were highly restrictive, and none of the people seeking asylum were eligible to work under these conditions.

¹³ From July 2018 onwards, asylum seekers were eligible to apply for a temporary work permit nine months after submitting an asylum application under the condition that they have not received a decision on their application yet. Asylum seekers who have received a first instance decision on their application and are currently appealing this decision do not have the right to work unless they have applied for the right to work prior to beginning of the appeal process. This period of nine months has been reduced to six months in January 2021.

ending the Direct Provision system and will replace it with a new International Protection accommodation policy centred on a not-for-profit approach” (Programme for Government, 2020, p.76). This Programme for Government was approved by all three coalition parties, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and the Green Party, respectively, on June 28th 2020. In 2019 the Government established an interdepartmental Expert Group, chaired by Ms Catherine Day, on the *Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process (Asylum Seekers)*. This working group published a report in October 2020 which informed the Irish Government’s subsequent publication of a White Paper in February 2021 (Day, 2020; Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth, 2021). The *White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service* outlined the Government’s plans to replace the current system of DP with own-door accommodation and increased welfare payments by 2024 (Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth, 2021). The Government also decided that the responsibility for accommodating people seeking asylum was to transfer from the Department of Justice to a newly formed department, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth under the leadership of Green Party Minister, Roderic O’Gorman, who was tasked with ending the system of DP during this Government’s term.

1.2.4. *From Direct Provision to Housing*

Having outlined the Irish policy context in terms of asylum policies and reception conditions, this section now turns to the policies underpinning refugees’ housing journeys once they gain status. Whereas policies during the asylum process are rooted in the idea of deterrence, once refugees are granted status, policies focus more strongly on their integration and inclusion into society (Bakker et al., 2016). The *Migrant Integration Strategy*, published in 2017, outlined the Irish Government’s approach to fostering integration (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). The stated goal of this four-year strategy spanning 2017-2020 was to enable migrants to “participate on an equal basis with those of Irish heritage” (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.8). While the strategy explicitly covered refugees who have been granted legal status, the strategy did not cover individuals or families who were in the asylum system. Bakker et al. (2016), who analysed the impact of asylum reception conditions on refugee integration in the UK and Netherlands, coined this shift in approach as the ‘Asylum-Integration Paradox’. The authors explained that policy is underpinned by contradicting objectives which are “on the one hand deterrent and exclusive during the asylum procedure and on the other

inclusive integration goals for those granted leave to remain” (p. 119). The fact that the Migrant Integration Strategy only covers refugees and not asylum seekers suggests that this ‘Asylum-Integration Paradox’ also applies in an Irish context.

While the Migrant Integration Strategy outlined various action points concerning employment, health and education, the strategy did not include any discussion of housing. The strategy’s only comment on the interrelation of housing and migration referred to the risk to integration posed by the “[s]egregation and ghettoization of specific migrant groups, with the potential for social exclusion and economic disadvantage” (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017, p.7). Yet, a recent analysis of the residential distribution of immigrants in Ireland, published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), found that “Irish cities show relatively low levels of residential segregation compared to European and American metropolitan areas” (Fahey et al., 2019, p. iii). Observing that migrants are overrepresented in the private rental market, the authors further stressed that it is not residential segregation that poses the greatest challenge to migrants’ integration but rather the “dysfunctional state of Ireland’s private rented sector, with steeply rising rents and high levels of homelessness” (Fahey et al., 2019, p. iv).

The international literature highlights that the transition from state-provided accommodation to living in the community is particularly challenging for refugees as they struggle to secure housing in the private rental market and are often denied access to social housing (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Netto, 2011a; Strang et al., 2018). In Ireland, the McMahon report highlighted the significant barriers faced by refugees when transitioning from DP to independent living (McMahon, 2015). Additionally, a small body of research has focused specifically on the transition from DP to the private rental market (Moreo and Lentin, 2010; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2014). The UNHCR (2014) study, which examined facilitators and barriers to refugee integration in Ireland, for instance, found that “the main problem [to integration] was actual access to housing, especially in the initial stages after their protection status has been granted” (p. 43). Similarly, in a qualitative study of refugees’ experiences of transitioning from DP to housing, Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2016) found that refugees encounter various obstacles when attempting to access housing once they gain status. According to the authors, these include discrimination on the part of landlords based on their status as refugees and rent supplement beneficiaries as well as refugees’ lack of information on how to access welfare payments and to search for housing (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016). As a result, refugees frequently rely on information provided through informal

networks or NGOs (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016). A study of Somali refugees who had recently been granted status in Ireland, similarly highlighted the important role played by social networks in facilitating refugees' access to housing (Moreo and Lentin, 2010).

Acknowledging the significant barriers faced by refugees when transitioning from DP to housing, the Irish Government established an interdepartmental task force in 2015 to coordinate supports for refugees who have been granted status. A 'Guide to Living Independently' was subsequently published in 2016 (Reception and Integration Agency, 2016) and information sessions were held to provide refugees with advice and information on their new rights and entitlements in relation to welfare and housing (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). Additionally, the Government provided funding to several NGOs for the provision of targeted integration support services through the Communities Integration Fund of the Irish Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (Arnold et al., 2018). However, since none of these NGOs have a national reach, there was considerable geographical variation in the availability and the nature of the supports available to refugees. In March 2019, the Department of Justice tasked the Peter McVerry Trust and Depaul – both NGOs with extensive experience in the provision of homelessness services – with supporting people who have gained status with the transition from DP to housing (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019). This new initiative aimed to ensure that all households recently granted refugee status had access to transition support services (Department of Justice and Equality, 2019).

The provision of additional supports to facilitate refugees' transition from DP to housing demonstrates that the Irish Government increasingly acknowledges this period of transition as a critical period in refugees' lives. Yet, once refugees move from DP to housing their housing needs receive considerably less attention in the context of Government initiatives and policies. This is despite long-standing calls for the need to "develop specific policies that mainstream the integration of migrants into all aspects of housing policy" (Pillinger, 2009, p.11). For instance, in 2016, the Irish Government published *Rebuilding Ireland - Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* with the objective of accelerating housing provision and reducing the number of households experiencing homelessness (Government of Ireland, 2016). This action plan specifically highlighted the housing needs of a number of groups, including older people, people with disabilities, Travellers and refugees who had arrived in Ireland through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. In contrast to programme refugees, refugees who had applied for asylum in Ireland and

subsequently transitioned from DP to housing were not considered as a specific group under this action plan (Government of Ireland, 2016). In addition to the mention of programme refugees, the more recently published strategy *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan*, published in 2021, also includes a reference to the Housing Agency's role in supporting the implementation of the above-mentioned White Paper that aims to end the system of DP (Department of Housing, 2021). Importantly, objective nine of *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan* aims to "provide accommodation for and integration into the community of Programme Refugees and those granted status under the International Protection Process" (Department of Housing, 2021, p.64). However, no corresponding actions for those refugees granted status were outlined. This lack of clearly defined actions suggests that significant gaps remain in terms of addressing refugees' housing needs once they move from DP to housing.

1.2.5. The Evolution of Irish Housing Policy and its Impact on Security of Tenure

Studies from Ireland and a number of European countries have pointed out that, due to lengthy periods of labour market exclusion during the asylum process, refugees frequently experience persistent poverty (Fasani et al., 2022; McGinnity, Privalko, et al., 2020; O'Connell, 2019). Refugees' lack of financial resources negatively impacts their ability to secure private rented accommodation, often leaving them dependent on rental subsidies or social housing (Adam et al., 2019; Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017; Strang et al., 2018). To understand refugees' housing journeys in Ireland, it is therefore important to understand the Irish context of housing provision for low-income households. Additionally, since many low-income households are renting in the private rental sector, this sector warrants particular attention.

Historically, the Irish private rental sector played a relatively insignificant role in the provision of housing. This was particularly the case from the 1960s onwards, when an increasing number of households entered homeownership, resulting in fewer households renting in the private rental sector (Galligan, 2005; Norris, 2016). However, similar to other countries, such as the UK and Australia, with high rates of home ownership, Ireland started to experience a significant shift from home-owner-occupied to private rented housing from the 1990s onwards (Galligan, 2005; Kemp, 2015; Norris, 2016; Wulff and Maher, 1998). While the private rental sector traditionally accommodated students and home movers, in the 1990s, increasing numbers of low-income households, mobile workers, and households saving for homeownership began renting in the sector (Galligan,

2005). This meant that a growing segment of the population relied on a vastly unregulated private rental sector to meet their housing needs. The economic boom of the 1990s went hand in hand with fast-growing rental and property prices, resulting in an escalating affordability and homelessness crisis (Memery, 2001). This crisis not only formed the backdrop of the government's decision to establish a separate accommodation system for newly arriving asylum seekers, as discussed earlier in this chapter but, importantly, also led to recognition among Irish politicians of the need to focus attention on the private rental sector.

The last three decades, spanning from the early 1990s to the present day, witnessed a gradual strengthening of the security of tenure for private renters. Improvements to security of tenure began when the Department of the Environment published two housing policy statements; *A Plan for Social Housing* (1991) and *Social Housing – The Way Ahead* (1995). These two statements focused primarily on increasing access to housing for low-income renters but also introduced minimum quality standards for rental properties, the requirement for landlords to provide tenants with a rent book and registration requirements for landlords (Galligan, 2005; Norris and Winston, 2004). The *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992* was central because it provided the legal foundations for these new regulations. In addition, the Act also defined the notice period for tenancy terminations for landlords and tenants as 28 days (Norris and Winston, 2004). These measures were an important first step towards improving security of tenure. Other significant milestones in expanding security of tenure in the private rental sector included the Commission on the Private Rented Sector (2000), followed by the subsequent *Residential Tenancies Act 2004*. The Commission on the Private Rented Sector, established in 1999, comprised a wide range of private rental sector stakeholders, including landlord and tenant representatives (Galligan, 2005). The Commission was tasked with identifying the most significant issues in the private rental market and devising recommendations that would improve security of tenure while balancing the rights and obligations of landlords and tenants and also increasing housing supply (Galligan, 2005). The Commission's report built the foundation of the subsequent *Residential Tenancies Act 2004*. One of the most significant changes brought about by the Act was that it defined the duration of standard private rental tenancies as four years ('Part IV' tenancies). This applied to all tenancies in which tenants had rented the property for more than six months. Furthermore, under this new law, landlords were only permitted to terminate these tenancies in specific circumstances, such as if the tenant was in breach of tenancy

conditions, when the landlord required the property for their own or their family's use, or if refurbishment of the property was required. Lastly, the Act also put the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), established in 2001, on a statutory footing. The RTB had and continues to have a key role in mediating between landlords and tenants in instances where a dispute arises and has been responsible for the registration of landlords since 2004. The *Residential Tenancy Act 2004* thus represented a key milestone in improving tenants' rights in the Irish private rental market. Yet, despite these improvements, security of tenure remained fragile as increasing rent inflation fuelled housing insecurity for renters in the private rental sector.

Several authors have suggested that the main driver of housing insecurity that renters continue to face is the financialisation that the private rental sector has experienced during the last three decades (Byrne, 2020; Kitchin et al., 2015; Lima et al., 2023). Since the 1980s, the Irish government introduced a range of measures to stimulate the supply of buy-to-let properties. For example, section 23 of the *Finance Act 1981* introduced a number of tax reliefs for private landlords, incentivising them to invest in private rental properties. These tax breaks were further strengthened through the *Urban Renewal Act 1986*, leading to an increase in buy-to-let landlords entering the private rental sector (Galligan, 2005). This growth in private investments in the private rental sector throughout the 1990s sparked concerns that these new landlords were at least partially responsible for the simultaneously increasing rental and property prices (Galligan, 2005). Consequently, in the late 1990s, the Irish government removed some of the tax incentives provided to landlords, only to reintroduce them in the early 2000s (Galligan, 2005). Since the early 2000s, Ireland has witnessed further financialisation of its private rental sector, resulting in a continuation of rent increases and deteriorating security of tenure. Lima et al. (2023) identify two distinct waves of financialisation, arguing that the first wave of financialisation was driven by small-scale landlords who invested in buy-to-let properties, taking advantage of reintroduced tax breaks and the ease of access to mortgage credits available to them from the 2000s onwards. During this time, increased access to credit was accompanied by accelerated housing output and fast-growing property prices, culminating in a property bubble that eventually burst in 2007, leading to a dramatic decrease in public and private housing output (Byrne and Norris, 2018). A second wave of financialisation began in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 when a growing number of institutional buy-to-let landlords entered the Irish private rental market to seize on the distressed property assets that became available during this time

(Kitchin et al., 2015; Lima et al., 2023). The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) played a key role during this second wave, in attracting large institutional buyers to the Irish private rental market (Kitchin et al., 2015; Lima et al., 2023). The Irish government supported NAMA's work by enacting tax breaks for Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) in 2013, which meant that these trusts were not required to pay corporate tax on their rental income (Lima et al., 2023). The financialisation of the private rental sector, initially driven by small-scale private landlords and more recently by institutional investment funds, thus continued to fuel rent inflation, pushing low-income tenants gradually out of the private rental sector (Byrne, 2020; Finnerty et al., 2016; Lima et al., 2023).

Social housing is intended to offer a housing option for households that are unable to compete in the private rental sector. In Ireland, social housing is delivered through three distinct types of landlords: local authorities, housing associations and private landlords (Finnerty et al., 2016). Until the early 1990s, local authorities were the primary provider of social housing, providing not-for-profit housing for a significant share of the population (Finnerty et al., 2016). While in 1961, 18.4% of households in Ireland rented local authority housing, this share in Ireland's overall housing supply gradually decreased to 6.9% in 2002. (Byrne and Norris, 2018). This decrease was caused by a combination of factors, including tenant purchase schemes and changes in the financialisation of local authority housing (Byrne and Norris, 2018). The Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and the following years of austerity in Ireland meant that central government investment in local authority housing contracted drastically, resulting in a dramatic decline of 91.5% in local authority housing output between 2008 and 2014 (Byrne and Norris, 2018). Local authorities are not the only not-for-profit housing providers in Ireland. Housing Associations are private, not-for-profit organisations that provide accommodation to qualified housing either through their own housing stock or, since the introduction of the *Housing Act 2009*, through leasing properties from local authorities or private property owners (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018). With the economic recovery following the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, the Irish government once more ramped up investment in the construction of local authority and Approved Housing Bodies (AHB) housing as well as new schemes, such as the cost rental scheme, managed by housing associations. While the construction of not-for-profit housing has markedly increased, construction activity has not been able to meet demand, leading to an increasing number of households renting with rent subsidies in the private rental market (Doolan et al., 2022; Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018).

In Ireland, there are three types of rental subsidies: rent supplements, the Residential Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and Housing Assistance Payments (HAP). Rent supplements, introduced in 1978, provide a rental subsidy to low-income households renting in the private rental market (Byrne and Norris, 2018). The RAS was introduced in 2004 to provide more long-term tenancy security for households who were in receipt of rent supplements for longer than 18 months (Doolan et al., 2022). In the case of RAS tenancies, the tenancy agreement is signed between the local authority and the private landlord for a specified number of years, thus increasing the security of tenure. Instead of a fixed rent, RAS tenants pay a differential rent, in line with the local authority differential scheme, which means that rent is calculated based on their income. Rent supplements and the RAS both represent static payments and when rental costs started to increase in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, these payments became less and less attractive to private landlords (Finnerty et al., 2016). In response to this situation, the government introduced HAP as part of the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014*, with the intention of gradually replacing the RAS tenancies. The HAP aimed to bridge the gap between rental subsidies and growing rent inflation by providing local authorities with the discretion of increasing HAP payments by 20% across Ireland, and up to 50% for households experiencing homelessness in the Dublin region (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018). The *Social Housing Strategy 2020, published in 2014*, emphasises the significant role of the private rental market in providing social housing through the HAP (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018; Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Doolan et al. (2022) estimated that the number of households benefitting from rent supplements, HAP and RAS increased from one-fifth in the early 1990s to one-third of all social housing tenants. Finnerty et al. (2016) observed that this advancement of private rental subsidies was driven by a number of considerations, including costs, tenancy security, the equal treatment of different modes of social renting, and employment incentives. Yet, despite these policy aims, the dramatic shift from social housing supplied primarily through local authority housing to social housing supplied through the private rental market meant that low-income renters are faced with reduced affordability and a loss in tenancy security (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018; Lima et al., 2023).

A growing number of tenancy terminations resulting from the sale of rental properties has become the main driver of homelessness in Ireland (Allen and Benjaminsen, 2020; Lima et al., 2023; Morrin, 2019a; O'Sullivan, 2016, 2020). The number of people accessing homelessness emergency accommodation rose from 3,607 in November 2014 to

10,514 in October 2019, representing an increase of 291% within a period of five years (Department of Housing, 2023). After the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the numbers accessing emergency services fell consistently for a period, reaching a low of 7,991 in May 2021. However, since that time, the number of people accessing emergency accommodation has increased steadily, surpassing pre-pandemic levels and standing at 12,847 in July 2023 (Department of Housing, 2023). A small number of reports and studies have highlighted that migrant households in Ireland are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Waldron et al. (2019), for example, in an examination of patterns of emergency accommodation use in Dublin City between 2012 and 2016, found that 10% of service users were of EEA origin, whereas 12% of service users were of non-EEA origin. The authors noted that service users from Nigeria, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo represent a majority of those who experience homelessness in the non-EEA population (Waldron et al., 2019). Furthermore, an investigation into family homelessness in Dublin showed that, in 2018, 19% of the family households accessing emergency accommodation held EU citizenship, while a further 20% of households were non-EU citizens (Morris, 2019b, p.30). Neither of these studies reported the legal status of the non-EEA households experiencing homelessness. However, a report on family homelessness in Dublin reported that 8.8% of the families surveyed had a history of living in DP (Gambi et al., 2018), pointing to a significant over-representation of refugee families in the homeless population. Research into migrant homelessness in Ireland has identified domestic violence as a frequent ‘trigger’ of homelessness among migrant women to enter emergency accommodation (Mayock et al., 2012). Overall, research in the Irish context indicates that migrant households have an increased risk of experiencing homelessness, which strongly suggests that they are particularly impacted by housing exclusion.

In response to this homelessness crisis, the Irish government amended the *Residential Tenancy Act 2004* in the years 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2021 to expand the security of tenure once more. Amendments made in 2015 added new protections against illegal evictions, introduced longer periods for notices of terminations, and limited the number of rent reviews to every two years (Finnerty et al., 2016). The amendments of 2016 increased tenancy duration to up to six years if a tenant is renting a property for more than six months and also introduced rent pressure zones capping annual rent increases at 4% in specified rent pressure zones (Byrne and McArdle, 2022). There was a sense that the *Residential Tenancy Act 2016* finally “recognised the importance of creating a rental sector that can provide secure, long-term, affordable private rental housing” (Byrne and McArdle,

2022, p.125). Yet, despite these efforts to improve tenancy security, a small but growing body of research in Ireland exploring the experiences of low-income renters, details how renters continue to navigate persistent housing insecurity and unequal tenant-landlord relationships (Byrne and McArdle, 2022; Waldron, 2022). Byrne and McArdle (2022) found that tenants frequently encountered landlords who did not comply with legislation such as the *Residential Tenancy Act 2004*. Yet, barriers to securing alternative accommodation meant that the renters interviewed did not assert their rights because they feared receiving a notice of tenancy termination (Byrne and McArdle, 2022). This prompted the authors to conclude that “policies introduced since 2016 have been largely ineffective” (Byrne and McArdle, 2022, p.125). Thus, the continued financialisation of the private rental market outweighed political efforts to improve security of tenure for renters, leaving low-income renters in the Irish private rental market, including refugees, particularly vulnerable to experiencing housing insecurity (Finn and Mayock, 2022; Lima et al., 2023).

1.3. Research Rationale

The establishment of the system of DP in 2000 introduced a distinct and institutionalised accommodation system for people seeking asylum in Ireland. Gaining refugee status therefore not only represents a critical junction in terms of gaining access to a more secure residence status; importantly, it also represents a fundamental change in terms of access to housing. A small number of studies have explored refugees' transition from DP to housing, highlighting the significant barriers they face when attempting to access accommodation in the private rental market because of unaffordable rents, lack of information about the housing system and the discriminatory letting practices of (some) landlords (Moreo and Lentin, 2010; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2014). However, since these studies were conducted, significant policy changes aimed at improving reception conditions and supporting refugees' transitions out of DP have taken place. While Government initiatives have aimed to improve refugees' transition from DP to housing, an escalating housing crisis has created new barriers of access to affordable housing. A small body of literature has investigated the experiences of low-income renters in Ireland and how they navigate ongoing housing insecurity in the private rental market. However, little is known about refugees' experiences of accessing or living in private rented accommodation or about their experiences of precarious housing, housing insecurity or homelessness.

Initiated in 2018 against a backdrop of significant policy change in relation to the reception conditions of asylum seekers, this research combined qualitative interviewing

with the ethnographic approach of the 'Go-Along', which involves the researcher and participant walking and conversing in a less formal way about experiences and meanings of housing, home and place, to conduct an in-depth investigation of the housing journeys of refugees in Ireland.

1.4. Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter, which has provided an account of the historical and current policy contexts of refugees' housing experiences in Ireland, has drawn attention to a relative dearth of research on the processes and practices associated with refugees' transitions from state-provided accommodation to housing. This thesis therefore aims to fill this gap in the literature through the conduct of a detailed qualitative examination of the housing journeys of refugees in Ireland.

Chapter Two reviews the Irish research on the housing journeys of refugees while also situating this literature in a wider international scholarship. This review highlights experiences of marginalisation and stigmatisation while refugees live in institutionalised accommodation during the asylum process and documents barriers and facilitators to their access to housing after gaining status, detailing a range of precarious housing outcomes, as well as experiences of inclusion and exclusion while living in the community.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical framework guiding this research. It begins by reviewing theoretical perspectives that have guided the study of refugees' housing journeys, demonstrating gaps in theoretical frameworks that consider life in refugee accommodation and in social and/or private rental accommodation after gaining status and the transition between these different types of accommodation. The second part of the Chapter focuses on Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*. It discusses how Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit, consisting of field, habitus, practice and capital, can facilitate an analysis of the transition from DP to housing as a transition in legal and symbolic standing, as well as a transition between two distinct fields of housing.

Chapter Four presents this study's methodological approach. A detailed description of the research design is provided, outlining the study's constructivist epistemology and its use of in-depth interviewing combined with the ethnographic method of the 'Go-Along'. This is followed by a discussion of the study design, including the ethical considerations that guided the conduct of the research, the sampling and recruitment strategies, researcher positionality, and the researcher's reflections on the

interviewing and 'Go-Along' process. This chapter concludes by documenting the study's data analysis procedures.

Chapter Five, the first of four findings chapters, introduces the research participants by providing demographic information, before detailing their experiences of applying for asylum in Ireland and entering the field of DP. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the housing conditions within DP and refugees' experiences of living in poor quality and stigmatising accommodation. The chapter draws attention to how participants attempted to avoid and/or resist the system of control operating within DP, also providing insight into how DP offered refugees access to a network of close and weak ties, which in turn bolstered their access to information and practical support.

Chapter Six focuses on the period after refugees gained status. It focuses on the emotions this transition evoked and details how refugees navigated the bureaucratic transition from DP to mainstream welfare provision. The chapter also explores how refugees developed their housing search practices in the context of low affordability and housing market discrimination and details their use of social networks and navigational capital when searching for housing.

Chapter Seven explores the transition from DP to housing and examines refugees' housing journeys after this critical juncture, including their experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity. Furthermore, the chapter details refugees' perceptions of the private rental market, which emerged as closely associated with reclaiming a sense of control, peace and normality. Yet, leaving the familiar field of DP behind also triggered feelings of insecurity, doubt and alienation. Notably, the chapter reveals how refugees adapted their practices in response to housing insecurity and the unequal landlord/tenant relationship they encountered in the private rental market.

Chapter Eight examines how the housing insecurity refugees experienced in the private rental market undermined their home-making practices, with social relations gaining importance in developing a sense of home. The chapter shows that, in addition to the continued separation from family members, poor housing conditions, lack of spatial capital, and neighbourhood composition impacted participants' ability to establish and sustain social connections and to find a sense of home.

Chapter Nine, the final chapter, provides a discussion of the main findings and reflects on their contribution to knowledge. The chapter explores how the application of Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*, particularly the concepts of field, habitus, practice and

capital, can be mobilised to understand the transition from DP to housing as a transition between two distinct housing fields, as well as a symbolic transition from asylum seeker to refugee, with direct consequences for refugees' position within broader society. The chapter concludes by presenting policy recommendations arising from the study's findings and also discusses the limitations of the study and avenues for further research.

2. Refugees' Housing Journeys: A Literature Review

The housing needs of refugees are increasingly recognised to be significant and to require further understanding (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Kisson, 2010; Netto, 2011b; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019b; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023; Ziersch et al., 2017). Notably, much of the literature focuses on either refugees' housing experiences during the asylum process or their experiences of housing after gaining status, despite calls to further an integrated understanding of refugees' housing journeys in countries of resettlement (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022). Recent years have seen an increased focus on refugees' experiences of transitioning from refugee accommodation to housing in the community when gaining status (Aigner, 2019; Foreman and Ní Raghallaigh, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). Therefore, as outlined in the Introduction, this research focuses on the transition of refugees from state-provided asylum accommodation to independent living.

This chapter presents a narrative literature review of research on refugees' housing experiences in countries of resettlement. The review focuses primarily on research conducted in countries of the Global North since they share certain commonalities in terms of social and economic development, imperial past and welfare provision. This chapter is organised into five main sections. First, the literature on asylum arrival infrastructures – which are a unique characteristic of refugees' housing pathways – are discussed. This is followed by an outline of the barriers encountered by refugees as they attempt to transition from these arrival infrastructures into independent living. The third section focuses on refugees' housing outcomes, including their experiences of homelessness, living in the private rental sector, accessing social housing and achieving homeownership. The fourth and fifth sections of the chapter examine the role of social capital in refugees' search for housing and in settling into new neighbourhoods.

2.1. Arrival Infrastructures

To have a home is a basic human need and is especially important for people who have experienced months or even years of displacement (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Brun and Fábos, 2015; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). This first section will review the literature on refugee arrival infrastructures in countries of resettlement, specifically refugees' experiences of living in accommodation provided during the asylum process. The factors affecting refugees' experiences of arrival infrastructures can be broadly divided into three

categories: the location of dispersal, living conditions and the duration of the asylum process.

2.1.1. The Impacts of Dispersal Policies

During the last forty years, several European countries have introduced policies to accommodate international protection applicants dispersed across the country (V. Robinson et al., 2003; Schuster, 2005). Accommodation allocated as part of these policies of dispersal have consisted of either accommodation centres (for example, in countries including Ireland, the Netherlands and Austria), low-cost housing units (in the UK, Sweden and Denmark), or a combination of the two (Norway and Germany) (Adam et al., 2019; Bevelander et al., 2019; Hauge et al., 2017; Larsen, 2011; Ní Chiosáin, 2019; V. Robinson et al., 2003). In some countries such as Germany and Denmark, refugees are legally obliged to live in state-provided accommodation during the asylum process whereas in other countries, such as Sweden or Norway, refugees can choose whether they want to avail of such accommodation. However, the non-take-up of state-provided accommodation usually results in either a reduction in financial support (e.g. Sweden, Norway) or a complete loss of support (e.g. Ireland, the UK), thereby placing people at risk of destitution (Adam et al., 2019; Bevelander et al., 2019; Hauge et al., 2017; Larsen, 2011; Ní Chiosáin, 2019; V. Robinson et al., 2003).

The location of these infrastructures has also been argued to affect the experiences of residents. Kreichauf (2018), for instance, observed in his analysis of refugee accommodation in Athens, Berlin, and Copenhagen that institutionalised forms of accommodation contributed to the othering and stigmatisation of its residents. Similarly, a recent report by the Irish Ombudsman for Children (2020), which examined the experiences of children living in Direct Provision, noted that “[m]any of the children felt isolated and different due to the geographical location of the centres they were staying in” (Ombudsman for Children, 2020, p.4). Additionally, in the UK, Spicer (2008) reported that it was common practice to disperse new arrivals to remote, low-income, predominately white neighbourhoods where the local community was more likely to react with racialised hostility. Similar dynamics have been observed in more diverse urban spaces, as reported in Echavarría Alvarez’s (2014) Austrian case study, which showed that the spatial and social exclusion of refugees in Vienna created a clear distinction between ‘locals’ and ‘others’ that fuelled mistrust and made it difficult to build relationships. Canada is one of the few countries without an institutionalised dispersal system in place and research has shown

that the lack of dispersal and institutionalisation allows refugee claimants to feel part of society and to more easily make Canada their new home (Levine-Rasky, 2016).

2.1.2. Institutionalised Living

Looking at living conditions in accommodation centres, European research has shown that centres across Europe provide highly institutionalised forms of living characterised by a lack of privacy, curtailed autonomy, overcrowding, and the provision of low-quality food (Higgins et al., 2019; Kreichauf, 2018; Moran et al., 2019; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010; O'Reilly, 2018; Soederberg, 2019; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019). The lack of privacy has been shown to affect women's safety in particular: research on women living in accommodation centres in Germany has demonstrated that communal kitchen facilities, shared routes to bathrooms, and unsecured bedroom doors made women more vulnerable to theft, harassment and abuse at the hands of both residents and staff (Hartmann, 2019). Findings such as these are echoed in the Irish context, where the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (2014, p.19) identified the Direct Provision system "as increasing vulnerability to sexual violence in Ireland". AkiDwA, a national network for migrant women has noted the lack of "dedicated facilities for vulnerable women who have suffered gender-based violence in their countries of origin or who have been trafficked to Ireland" (AkiDwA, 2010, p. 8). Additionally, overcrowding and the resulting lack of privacy have been linked to increased tensions between residents (Hauge et al., 2017).

In addition to the heightened risk of abuse, it is well established that institutionalised accommodation centres negatively impact residents' mental health (Porter and Haslam, 2005). Research in Ireland has shown that asylum seekers and refugees are more likely than Irish citizens to suffer from depression and PTSD (J. McMahon et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2013) and that asylum seekers are more vulnerable to depression than refugees because of their insecure residence status, the asylum process itself, and their experiences of social exclusion (Carpenter, 2020; Crumlish and Bracken, 2011; Toar et al., 2009). Accommodation centres have also been demonstrated to negatively affect residents' physical health. For example, the provision of poor-quality food with little nutritional value leads to hunger and digestive problems; poor-quality housing can cause asthma; and overcrowded living situations have been found to be an ideal breeding ground for communicable diseases (Arnold, 2012; Fanning et al., 2001; Ziersch and Due, 2018), all of which created particular concern during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Gusciute, 2020).

Several authors have identified these arrival infrastructures as a form of homelessness (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). For instance, the Global Framework for Conceptualising and Measuring Homelessness, proposed by Busch-Geertsema et al. (2016), classifies refugee accommodation centres as a form of homelessness because “occupants are generally excluded from the security domain (with no de jure or de facto security of tenure) and the social domain (with little privacy, security or safety from fellow occupants, and few opportunities for normal social relations)” (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016, p. 126). Yet, while people experiencing homelessness are usually supported in sourcing independent and adequate accommodation, there is an expectation (and sometimes even a legal requirement) that people seeking asylum remain in these accommodation centres until the outcome of their application is decided (O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). Despite these challenging housing conditions, the literature also provides examples of people employing various strategies to turn the centres into homes by furnishing and decorating the rooms (Thorshaug and Brun, 2019), organising celebrations and offering each other emotional and practical supports (Hartmann, 2019).

2.1.3. *The Asylum Process*

The nature and length of the asylum process add a further temporal dimension to the housing exclusion of asylum seekers. In Ireland, large backlogs of pending asylum claims, and a tendency for negative first-instance decisions¹⁴ resulting in lengthy appeal procedures, meant that many have to wait for a final decision for several years with limited rights to welfare, housing, employment and family reunification (Conlan et al., 2012). In countries throughout Europe, research has shown that while people might feel relieved to have access to shelter during the few weeks following their arrival in a new country, the liminality of the accommodation centres, the uncertainty of when one will be allowed to move onwards into more permanent and independent housing, as well as the imminent threat of deportation soon starts to have negative effects (Hartmann, 2019; O'Reilly, 2018; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019). Furthermore, living in close proximity with people at various stages of the asylum process can generate a highly stressful environment. While some individuals are waiting for a first instance decision or an outcome of an appeal, others have already received a final decision, either in the form of a deportation order or in the form

¹⁴ A first instance decisions is granted by the Minister of Justice based on a recommendation made by the International Protection Office and acts as the first instance of the administrative international protection process.

of gaining legal status. This dynamic adds to the existing uncertainty surrounding one's own application (Hartmann, 2019; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019). In an examination of the Irish Direct Provision system, O'Reilly (2018, p.832) described this period of waiting as "a state of 'permanent temporariness' in which waiting and uncertainty become part of everyday life".

Together the studies discussed in this section provide important insights into refugees' experiences of living in state-provided accommodation during the asylum process. Notably, they also reveal variations across countries in terms of the dispersal policies in place and the provision of accommodation. Additionally, this body of literature has drawn attention to how the provision of stigmatised and institutionalised accommodation, as well as the uncertainty of the asylum process, negatively impact refugees' sense of control and their mental well-being. Yet, little is known about the strategies that refugees may develop and mobilise to improve their housing experiences within refugee accommodation.

2.2. After Gaining Status: Barriers to Accessing Housing

Although gaining status, overall, is associated with increased access to social rights and freedom of movement it is also accompanied by various challenges associated with navigating the transition from state-provided accommodation to independent living. This section discusses the literature that has examined the barriers that refugees encounter when attempting to access housing after gaining status. Particular attention is directed to the affordability of private rented accommodation, access to housing and welfare supports, language barriers when searching for housing, and experiences of discrimination in the private rental market.

A growing body of research has examined refugees' early housing journeys once they gain status (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Foreman and Ní Raghallaigh, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). While some countries evict refugees into homelessness once they gain status, others allow refugees to remain in state-provided accommodation until they have secured accommodation. In the UK, for example, refugees have a 28-days period to leave their accommodation, which means that they are often forced to access homeless shelters until they find a more permanent housing solution (Mitton, 2021; Strang et al., 2018). In countries such as Ireland and Germany, the Government does not usually evict people into homelessness. As a result, refugees often remain stuck in arrival infrastructures for months or even years because they are unable to find affordable and adequate accommodation

outside of the centres (Adam et al., 2019; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Pearlman, 2017). In contrast, in the Netherlands, refugees are offered access to social housing dispersed across the country once they gain status (Van Liempt and Staring, 2021).

2.2.1. *Economic Barriers to Affording Rent*

The affordability of private rented accommodation is one of the main barriers to finding a suitable place to live (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Murdie and Logan, 2011; Silvius, 2020). Refugees are often affected by poverty due to their systematic exclusion from the labour market during the asylum process, including (often extended) periods when they are not allowed to work, their dispersal into socio-economically deprived areas, and problems connected to the lack of recognition of their educational qualifications and prior work experience (Bakker et al., 2016; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018; Fasani et al., 2022). Limited knowledge of the local language creates additional barriers to finding decent work (Morrice et al., 2021) and pushes many refugees into low-skilled jobs or unemployment (Pearlman, 2017; Silvius, 2020; Strang et al., 2018).

A recent analysis of the European Labour Force Survey (EULFS) has shown “that refugees in EU countries have experienced slower and more difficult economic integration than other migrants [...] a ‘refugee gap’ that is substantial and persistent over time” (Fasani et al., 2018, p.32). The authors further noted that dispersal policies and a negative recognition rate of asylum applications¹⁵ negatively impact refugees’ labour market participation, with Ireland showing one of the strongest negative effects (Fasani et al., 2018). These findings have been corroborated by three recent Irish studies which found persistent unemployment to be more prevalent among ethnic groups who had a higher likelihood of having experienced the asylum system (McGinnity, Privalko, et al., 2020; O’Connell, 2019). This is not surprising since, in Ireland, asylum seekers were not permitted to work or engage in vocational training until 2018. While opting into the *EU (recast) Reception Conditions Directive* brought about important improvements in relation to labour market access, other barriers to full participation remained, including the remoteness of the accommodation centres; the driving ban in place for people seeking asylum; frequent transfers from one DP centre to another across the country, without any consideration given to the employment situation of a person; and the temporary nature of the work permit (Doras, 2021).

¹⁵ Recognition rate refers to the percentage of positive decisions out of the total number of asylum decisions made at each stage of the asylum process.

Due to this labour market exclusion, refugees are likely to rely on welfare payments when gaining status (Strang et al., 2018). Yet, upon gaining status, refugees' rights and entitlements, as well as the corresponding bureaucratic processes, change fundamentally and require people to navigate a new set of bureaucratic rules and procedures (Foreman and Ní Raghallaigh, 2019; Obeid, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). In Ireland, Foreman and Ní Raghallaigh (2019) identified the lack of information provided to refugees on the new bureaucratic process as creating major constraints of access to welfare payments. In the UK, Strang et al. (2018) found that even small mistakes in welfare applications could result in delayed welfare payments, leading to severe hardship for welfare applicants, also noting that service providers play an important role in supporting people's applications for welfare support. Furthermore, the slowness of some bureaucratic systems can pose further challenges. For example, research conducted in Germany has demonstrated that people who successfully secured housing in a highly competitive housing market had to wait for several weeks for the Government to pay their housing subsidy and deposit to the prospective landlord, which meant that landlords frequently withdrew their offers as they were not willing to wait (Pearlman, 2017; Soederberg, 2019).

A further problem reported in the literature is that payments often do not match the high rents in the private rental market (Adam et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007). To counter this problem, in some cities like Berlin, refugees' housing allowances are topped up by 20 percent to facilitate better access to the housing market (Soederberg, 2019). In Ireland, there is also ample evidence that housing assistance payments are not adequate to meet the high rental costs in the private rental market (Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Similar to the top-up introduced in Berlin, homeless households in Dublin – including refugees exiting DP accommodation centres – may receive a top-up to the housing assistance payment (HAP), called 'Homeless HAP', to enable them to compete in the private rental market (Hearne and Murphy, 2018).

2.2.2. Language Barriers

In addition to problems associated with the unaffordability of private-rented accommodation, the international literature has highlighted the importance of knowing the local language as a resource when searching for housing, whether online or offline, and when communicating with service providers, local authority officers and prospective landlords (Adam et al., 2019; Obeid, 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007). Not knowing the local language has then been shown to be a major barrier to sourcing adequate housing (Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sjollem et al., 2012; Strang et al., 2018). Studies have also reported

that not knowing the local language makes people more vulnerable to exploitation and that not understanding the content of rental contracts makes it more likely that people unknowingly break leases, for example, when moving to another place (Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Silvius, 2020).

Language classes not only help to improve language skills but provide an important space where information and knowledge could be discussed and shared (Hartmann, 2019; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). For these reasons, learning English, combined with learning about one's rights, has been highlighted as an influential factor when securing housing (Thurston et al., 2013). However, Ireland, in contrast to most other European countries, does not have a national policy framework regulating the funding and provision of English language education (Kett, 2018). As a result, the provision of language classes across Ireland varies for refugees (Gusciute et al., 2016). The international literature has shown that in the absence of knowing the local language, interpreters become indispensable. Interpreters can be friends or relatives, who take up the role of informal interpreting, or professional interpreters, although the latter are often expensive and difficult to afford (Oudshoorn et al., 2019). In Ireland, the provision of interpretation services is patchy and the quality varies greatly, which forces people to rely on friends and family who might have limited knowledge of English themselves (Ćatibušić et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2017).

2.2.3. Discrimination by Private Landlords

In addition to the impact of rent affordability and language barriers on refugees' search for housing, the international literature has identified discrimination by prospective landlords as an additional barrier to refugees accessing adequate housing. The nature of discrimination experienced by refugees, however, tends to vary. For example, in Canada, Walsh et al.'s (2016) qualitative study found that the 26 immigrant women interviewed experienced discrimination during their search for adequate housing based on "ethnicity, language, immigration status, source of income and having children" (p. 895). Another Canadian study, which focused on the experiences of Black African migrants in Toronto's housing market, found that almost all survey respondents experienced discrimination while searching for housing, particularly if they had refugee status and if they were dependent on social welfare (Teixeira, 2008). These findings are echoed by studies in other jurisdictions, including Germany and Austria, which have reported housing market discrimination based on refugee status, religion, family size, not knowing the local language, unemployment and ethnicity (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019).

In the Irish context, there is limited research on discrimination experienced by immigrants and refugees in the private rental market. However, a survey-based analysis by McGinnity et al. (2006) reported that 15% of immigrant work permit holders encountered discrimination when attempting to access housing. Additionally, Irish research by Grotti et al. (2018) on discrimination in the housing market found that people who reported discrimination were more likely to be lone parents, young, Black, unemployed, of Traveller background, to have disabilities, and to have low educational attainment. In terms of housing tenure, private and social housing renters were more likely to experience discrimination than homeowners (Grotti et al., 2018). Furthermore, a recent field experiment conducted by Gusciute et al. (2022) compared the response rate to fictive applications to view apartments in Dublin by Nigerian, Polish and Irish applicants. The study found that Irish women were twice as likely to receive a response than Nigerian men with the same employment credentials (Gusciute et al., 2022). Finally, a qualitative study of immigrants' housing pathways in a rural Irish town reported that tenants of African origin faced particular discrimination when seeking accommodation in the private rental market (Finn and Mayock, 2022). Overall, these findings underscore the prevalence of housing market discrimination based on race in Ireland.

Taken together, the studies reviewed in this section provide important insights into the barriers that refugees encounter in securing accommodation in the private rental market; namely, barriers to the affordability of rental costs and to accessing housing and welfare supports, language barriers and experiences of discrimination when searching for housing. While the existing literature sheds light on these obstacles, less is known about the strategies and practices that refugees develop to overcome the housing exclusion they face within the private rental market. The following section examines the housing outcomes of refugees in greater detail.

2.3. Housing Outcomes of Refugees

Once refugees secure accommodation they experience a range of housing outcomes, including insecure tenure, overcrowded and poor-quality housing and a heightened risk of homelessness (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Kissoon, 2010; Netto, 2011b; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019b; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023; Ziersch et al., 2017). Poor housing outcomes are associated with negative consequences for refugees' physical and mental health (Palmer, 2011; Ziersch and Due, 2018) and their family lives (Oudshoorn et al., 2019). This section delves deeper into refugees' housing experiences by examining patterns of (im)mobility as well as their

experiences of living in the private and social rental market, encompassing experiences ranging from homelessness to achieving homeownership.

2.3.1. (Im)mobility

As a result of displacement, many refugees will have experienced frequent moves, with some living for extended periods in formal and/or informal refugee camps in various countries. The literature indicates that this mix of forced and voluntary mobility continues after people arrive in countries of resettlement (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Stewart, 2012; Walsh et al., 2016). As outlined earlier, dispersal policies restrict refugees' mobility by allocating accommodation without considering individual preferences. In many countries, gaining status therefore means that refugees have, for the first time, the choice of where to settle. There are, however, exceptions to this rule: for example, in several German regions, regional legislation requires that refugees stay for a period of at least three years in the location of dispersal, even after they have gained status (Adam et al., 2019). Similarly, in the UK, access to local authority housing is restricted by the *Homelessness Act 2004*, which requires people to have a 'local connection', accepting only the place of dispersal as such (Stewart, 2012). In Ireland, the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) represents a similar piece of legislation which requires people to prove a local connection when accessing social housing support. However, refugees are exempt from this rule when they gain status, which means they are free to move to a location of their choice (Crosscare Migrant Project, 2019; Murray, 2012).

European research has shown that, after gaining status, many people decide to move to urban areas in the hope of finding better economic and social opportunities (Aigner, 2019; Stewart, 2012). Stewart (2012), who analysed the mobility patterns of refugees who were dispersed to Glasgow, found that people who decided to move onwards to London preferred London because it offered better access to established ethnic communities. This preference for urban areas means that most research on refugees' housing integration has focused on urban areas (e.g. Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Hiebert, 2017). However, in recent years a smaller body of literature has begun to examine the housing experiences of refugees who either move to or remain in rural sites of dispersal (e.g. Finn and Mayock, 2022; Larsen, 2011).

Moving closer to existing ethnic communities has been found to be an important factor in refugees' decision to move because these communities can provide easier access to practical support, for example, in the form of informal childcare arrangements for

families (Stewart, 2012). Meanwhile, refugees who develop community ties at sites of dispersal (Stewart, 2012) and feel at home in their neighbourhood (Netto, 2011b) are more likely to stay. Even when offered more suitable housing elsewhere, refugees might decide to stay because they fear that moving could disrupt these social networks (Soederberg, 2019). Yet, while some do not want to move because they feel at home where they live, for others, the lack of affordable housing means that they are unable to move even if they want to do so (Netto, 2011b).

A number of studies have shown that, during their early housing journeys, refugees tend to move frequently, often with the goal of accessing better quality housing and safer neighbourhoods (Carter and Osborne, 2009). However, increased mobility does not always lead to an improved housing situation and can, instead, lead to them moving from one temporary housing situation to another (Walsh et al., 2016). Moving is also associated with a number of negative consequences, including disrupted access to social networks and services such as GPs (Strang et al., 2018), as well as increased stress and diminished mental health (Warfa et al., 2006; Ziersch et al., 2017). To date, in Ireland, research has not examined refugees' pattern of onwards mobility once they move out of DP.

2.3.2. Housing Insecurity in the Private Rental Market

For most refugees, the private rental market is the only feasible access route to housing. However, rents are high across Europe – especially in urban areas – which leads to an affordability crisis that can result in homelessness and precarious housing situations characterised by poor quality housing, low tenancy security and overcrowding (Clair et al., 2019; Lima et al., 2023).

Owing to the high cost of good quality housing, refugees frequently live in rental accommodation at the lower end of the quality spectrum where they encounter problems, including dampness, faulty appliances and general disrepair (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Netto, 2011b; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; Ziersch et al., 2017). While Walsh et al. (2016) found that people who live in poor housing conditions are often not aware of their rights as tenants (Walsh et al., 2016), knowing one's rights does not necessarily protect refugees from being treated unjustly. For example, Oudshoorn et al. (2019) qualitative study of Syrian refugee families in Canada found that although the families were well aware of their landlords' responsibilities, they nonetheless encountered various barriers to asserting their rights because of not knowing the local language, combined with

expensive interpreter services, which hindered effective communication with landlords (Oudshoorn et al., 2019).

Living in low-quality housing has been linked to physical and mental ill-health, including respiratory issues, chronic pains and depression (WHO, 2018; Ziersch and Due, 2018). In Ireland, Grotti et al. (2018) have reported that non-EU migrants are more likely to live in poor-quality housing than EU and Irish citizens and explained this overrepresentation by pointing out that non-EU migrants are more likely to rent in the private rental market where the quality of the housing stock is lower. In a qualitative study of immigrants' early housing journeys in Ireland, which also included refugees, Finn and Mayock (2022) similarly found that refugees "entered into poorer quality, smaller and cheaper rental properties" (p.13) after leaving Direct Provision. The findings documented by a small number of studies conducted in Canada and Italy suggest that living in poor quality housing can be a choice in that living in a precarious housing situation was, for some refugees, a strategy used to save money, for example, to support family living in their country of origin (Belloni, 2016; Silvius, 2020).

Pillinger's (2009) qualitative case study of migrant households living in one Dublin suburb found that housing satisfaction and housing quality improved with time for most households. Interestingly, research in Canada, however, has shown that housing satisfaction was less dependent on the actual housing situation than on refugees' understanding of what constitutes an acceptable standard of quality in the country of resettlement (Carter and Osborne, 2009). This study's findings indicate that refugees were more satisfied with their housing situation during the first year subsequent to their arrival than later on, despite their improved housing situations, leading the authors to suggest that once refugees learn what can be considered a decent housing standard in the country of resettlement, they may view their own housing situation less favourably (Carter and Osborne, 2009).

Since smaller rental housing units are usually more affordable than larger ones, refugees have consistently been reported to live in overcrowded housing situations (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Netto, 2011b; Sherrell et al., 2007; Teixeira, 2008) and to a greater extent than other immigrant groups (Francis and Hiebert, 2014). Overcrowded households can be roughly divided into two groups: family households, who are unable to afford or find an apartment that accommodates the size of their family, and singles who live in shared accommodation.

For large families, it can be particularly challenging to source appropriately sized apartments (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Netto, 2011b) and, if they do find them, they are often unaffordable (Sherrell et al., 2007). Oudshoorn et al. (2019) reported that all 17 of the Syrian refugee families they interviewed experienced overcrowding, with an average of six to seven people sharing a small two-bedroom apartment, resulting in a severe lack of privacy. Studies have also highlighted that family households often outgrew their apartments or houses, either by having additional children or following successful family reunification (Adam et al., 2019; Netto, 2011b). Some countries have attempted to address the problem of overcrowding. In Germany, for example, welfare officials – who are required to sign off on rental contracts – only accept apartments that fulfil certain minimum standards regarding space (Adam et al., 2019). However, while this policy may prevent people from living in overcrowded housing conditions, it can simultaneously further curtail the availability of housing options for families (Adam et al., 2019).

In 2021, Ireland had one of the lowest overcrowding rates in Europe (Eurostat, 2023). However, like in other European countries, migrants – particularly people from non-EU countries – have a higher likelihood than their local-born counterparts of living in overcrowded housing situations. Grotti et al.'s (2018) investigation of housing inequality in the Irish context found that non-EU migrants were more likely to experience overcrowding even when income, area and type of housing tenure were taken into account, leading the authors to suggest that discrimination in the housing market may account for the increased incidence of overcrowding among non-EU migrants.

Living in shared accommodation is a popular housing choice, particularly for single refugee households who move to a new city, because it offers an affordable starting point for their housing search (Aigner, 2019; Teixeira, 2008). Although shared rental costs are generally lower than single occupancy rentals, Aigner (2019) has observed that some landlords charge refugee tenants comparatively high rents for a bed in overcrowded apartments. Sharing a tight space with people who have different ways of living can be a constant source of conflict, particularly when what is initially meant to be a temporary solution turns, in the absence of affordable housing options, into a permanent housing situation (Aigner, 2019; Teixeira, 2008). Overcrowding is also associated with high levels of housing insecurity because landlords can react by either increasing rents or evicting tenants if more people than initially agreed live in an accommodation (Aigner, 2019; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019a; Teixeira, 2008). Furthermore, Ziersch et al. (2017) have shown

that overcrowding and the resulting lack of privacy and tenancy security can lead to various mental health issues including depression, stress and anxiety.

As Francis and Hiebert (2014) have observed, there is a fine line between living in overcrowded accommodations and hidden homelessness. Hidden homelessness can include staying with friends or relatives for (sometimes lengthy) periods of time and is prevalent among refugee populations (Kissoon, 2010). People living in situations of hidden homelessness have been shown to be at a heightened risk of homelessness because the person who provides a temporary place to sleep can withdraw that offer at any time (Walsh et al., 2016). There is also evidence of a risk of exploitation associated with these housing arrangements. For example, Walsh et al. (2016) who examined insecure housing situations of newcomer women, including refugees, in Montréal Canada found that women living in hidden homelessness were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

2.3.3. *Homelessness*

Research in the UK and Ireland has found that refugees have a higher risk of experiencing homelessness at specific stages of their housing journeys, particularly, for example, at the point of gaining status when they may lose the right to asylum accommodation in the UK (Kissoon, 2010; Strang et al., 2018) or at the point of family reunification (Smith et al., 2023). While these risks are unique to refugees, other risks of experiencing homelessness, including evictions by private landlords because of rent arrears (St. Arnault and Merali, 2019a; Walsh et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2017) or addiction¹⁶ (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017), fleeing domestic violence (Thurston et al., 2013) and escaping exploitative housing situations¹⁷ (Sjollema et al., 2012) have been observed independent of legal status.

Refugees encounter various barriers of access to homelessness emergency accommodation. Research from the UK has shown that refugees who are not considered vulnerable and who do not fit a relatively narrow definition of what constitutes homelessness often struggle to access homelessness services (Obeid, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). This particularly affects single households and refugees who are staying with friends or relatives who are often considered as having their housing needs met. In cases when refugees gain access, living in homelessness accommodation can be challenging because

¹⁶ Substance abuse/addiction was shown to be less frequent among immigrants than in the local population (Klodawsky et al. 2014).

¹⁷ Exploitative housing situations are often associated with specific immigration pathways such as private sponsorship and family reunification as both pathways lead into situation of dependence for the sponsored individual (Sjollema et al., 2012).

they frequently cannot follow their religious and/or cultural cooking practices, are not allowed visits from friends, have to follow strict curfews, and experience racialised harassment by other residents (Strang et al., 2018). Some authors argue that the racialised harassment experienced by refugees in emergency shelters arises as a direct consequence of stressed housing markets in which various impoverished and marginalised groups are competing for a small number of affordable housing units (Adam et al., 2019; Netto, 2011b). The manner in which homelessness services are delivered can alleviate or heighten these tensions: Lancione's (2016) ethnographic study of homelessness services in Turin, Italy, found that conflicts were less likely to occur in good quality homelessness services that are underpinned by an appreciation of difference (Lancione, 2016).

To date in Ireland, there has been no detailed investigation of refugees' experiences of homelessness. One Europe-wide study, based on the conduct of expert interviews that examined the prevalence of refugee and asylum seeker homelessness in 12 European countries, concluded that Ireland is not "experiencing any particular pressure from asylum seekers or refugees on homelessness services" (Baptista et al., 2016, p.53). This finding contrasts with more recent research on family homelessness in Dublin, which found that 8.8% of the families interviewed had a history of living in Direct Provision (Gambi et al., 2018), pointing to a significant overrepresentation of refugees in the population of homeless families. A further indication that people who have been granted status may be at higher risk of experiencing homelessness is the overrepresentation of non-EU households in the homelessness statistics (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Homeless Agency, 2008; Morrin, 2019a; Morrin and O'Donoghue Hynes, 2018; Waldron et al., 2019), particularly of people of African origin (Central Statistics Office, 2012; Waldron et al., 2019), who have a higher probability of having arrived through the asylum process.

2.3.4. Social Housing

Many authors studying refugees' housing integration have highlighted the importance of sufficient and good-quality social housing as an alternative to the insecure and unaffordable private rental market for low-income groups, including refugee households (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Silvius, 2020; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). Yet, the decline in the provision of social housing in a number of countries had direct consequences for refugees' housing journeys as research conducted in Canada, a liberal welfare state, has highlighted. Carter and Osborne (2009), for example, reported that within three years of arrival, 40% of the refugee survey respondents were living in social housing – thereby paying lower rents and living in better quality housing than the other respondents. Yet,

more recent research has shown that it had become more difficult for refugees to access social housing (Silvius, 2020). Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, are still in a stronger position to accommodate low-income groups, including refugees, because they have a historically large social housing stock (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017). Yet, the availability of social housing is not the only factor limiting access to social housing as research in Vienna has shown: despite the city's strong social housing sector, refugees struggle to gain access (Aigner, 2019).

Numerous bureaucratic rules regulate who gets a place on a social housing waiting list and who is considered a priority for allocation (Obeid, 2019). Some of these rules, as the following studies illustrate, are aimed specifically at excluding recent immigrants (including refugees) from social housing waiting lists. In Vienna, Austria, for instance, a person must have lived at a Viennese address for two consecutive years to qualify for access to social housing, thereby automatically excluding refugees who are new to the city (Aigner, 2019). Similarly, in Italy, refugees must be considered a habitual resident to be eligible for social housing. However, Italian local authorities introduced a number of rules that made it difficult for refugees to register as habitually resident, prompting Bolzoni et al. (2015) to conclude that access to social housing was granted not on the basis of need, but rather on the grounds of racialised conceptions of who belongs. In Ireland, a similar instrument, the Habitual Residence Condition, regulates who can access welfare and housing supports. Yet, in contrast to Italy, once refugees gain status in Ireland they are eligible to register on the social housing waiting list, as outlined in the Housing Circular 41/2012 (Murray, 2012). However, a key determinant of social housing allocation is time spent on the waiting list, which can extend for very many years, and time spent living in Direct Provision is not counted towards this waiting time.

In many European countries, some groups such as people with medical conditions, families (Aigner, 2019) or people who are at immediate risk of homelessness (Obeid, 2019) are prioritised for social housing allocation. The prioritisation of families with children means that singles often struggle to access social housing (Aigner, 2019; Grotti et al., 2018). In Ireland, the composition of the social housing stock, which consists primarily of two and three bed-room apartments, means that single and large family households will typically wait for longer to access social housing than smaller family households (National Oversight and Audit Commission, 2017 cited in Grotti et al. 2018). While families with three or more children are relatively few in number on local housing authority waiting lists (only 362 families in 2019), there were 32,607 single people waiting for social housing

in 2019, which means that the nature of the social housing stock impacts particularly negatively on single households (Housing Agency, 2019).

Although social housing is frequently recommended as a solution to the housing issues faced by refugees, living in social housing is not always a positive experience for them. Local authorities often allocate housing without considering people's preferences regarding location (Bakker et al., 2016; Obeid, 2019; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021), with some countries, like the Netherlands and the UK, only allocating social housing in the region to which refugees are dispersed to during the asylum process (Bakker et al., 2016; Stewart, 2012; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021). As a result, refugees often end up living long distances from their relatives and ethnic communities (Bakker et al., 2016; Obeid, 2019; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021). Furthermore, Carter and Osborne (2009) have reported that refugees who lived in social housing in Canada worried about their safety to a far greater extent than refugees renting in the private rental market. A similar pattern may exist in Ireland since one investigation into reports of racist incidents in relation to housing found that half of all such incidents were reported by social housing tenants (Buczkowska and Ní Chonaill, 2019). Furthermore, families renting social housing in Vienna have been found to experience severe overcrowding because of not being allocated appropriately sized apartments (Aigner, 2019) while, in Ireland, social housing tenants have been demonstrated to be more likely to experience housing deprivation, overcrowding and neighbourhood problems than private rental tenants (Grotti et al., 2018).

While in some countries social housing is a favoured housing option among middle-class households (e.g. Austria), in others social housing is reserved solely for marginalised groups – with direct consequences for its reputation and status in society. Vassenden and Lie (2013) examined experiences of stigma among social housing tenants in Norway, where homeownership is widely viewed as the 'normal' way of living. Interestingly, their qualitative interviews revealed that stigmatisation did not affect all social housing tenants equally: while middle-class Norwegians experienced social housing as stigmatising and aspired to be homeowners, Somali refugees viewed living in social housing as a success because it provided them with a more stable tenancy than living in private rented accommodation. Somali refugees, Vassenden and Lie (2013) suggest, may perceive social housing as less stigmatising because it was a common form of housing tenure within their community. In Ireland, living in social housing estates, especially when they are recognisable as such due to their design, is often highly stigmatised (Norris et al.,

2019). To date, no similar investigation has been undertaken into whether social housing is considered a viable choice among refugee households in Ireland.

While several studies have highlighted the difficulties faced by refugees when attempting to access social housing, one Danish study has drawn attention to how common living in social housing can be for some immigrant groups, including refugees. Skovgaard Nielsen (2017) calculated that 75% and 68% of their study's Somali and Turkish households, respectively, lived in social housing in Copenhagen, with social housing therefore representing an important exit route from the insecure private rental market and from situations of homelessness. This same study also highlighted that gaining access to social housing was by no means the end of immigrants' housing journeys, but rather the start of a housing career within the social housing sector (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017).

2.3.5. Homeownership

Homeownership can be viewed as signifying successful housing integration, particularly in countries with high homeownership rates (e.g. Norway and Australia) where other forms of accommodation, such as social housing or private rental accommodation, are highly stigmatised (Hebbani et al., 2018; Vassenden and Lie, 2013). Despite the various barriers refugees face when accessing housing, Canadian longitudinal survey data (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Hiebert, 2009, 2017) has consistently shown that refugees reach a surprisingly high homeownership rate within the first five years of arriving in Canada. Hiebert (2009) analysed the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, showing that 20% of the Government Assisted and Privately Sponsored refugees interviewed for the survey became homeowners within four years of their arrival. In a subsequent study, which linked the Immigrant Landing File with the 2011 National Household Survey, Hiebert (2017) showed that, after five years, one-third of the refugees lived in a homeowner-occupied household (Hiebert, 2017). Similarly, Perugia (2019) has noted that 20% of the Sudanese population in Perth, of which many were refugees at the point of arriving in Australia during the past 15 years, were paying a mortgage. In Germany, however, a country with a relatively low homeownership rate, a survey of refugee households found that only 1% of the refugees who gained status between 2008 and 2012 subsequently became homeowners (Worb et al. 2016 as cited in Adam et al., 2019). It has been suggested that the higher homeownership rate among refugees in Canada can be explained by the Canadian government's policy of choosing refugees for resettlement who (from the Government's perspective) have the best chance of integrating successfully (Silvius, 2016). While administrative and survey data such as these show that some refugees succeed in

becoming homeowners, there is a paucity in qualitative research exploring refugees' experiences of homeownership. One possible explanation for this could be that many qualitative studies researching refugees housing journeys rely on recruitment through gatekeepers, which may increase the likelihood of recruiting individuals who have a housing need. Successive Irish governments have promoted homeownership for decades and, historically, Ireland has a high homeownership rate. However, while Corrigan et al. (2019, p.7) reported that "[t]he preference for homeownership over renting was very similar among Irish and non-Irish respondents", there are very significant disparities between the two groups when it comes to achieving homeownership. In 2018, 76.6% of people born in Ireland were living in homeowner-occupied housing compared with 25.5% of non-EU born migrants (Eurostat, 2022).

While some studies have highlighted that homeownership among refugees can be a strategy used to avoid paying high rents in the private rental market (Easthope et al., 2018; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019b), Carter and Osborne (2009) have pointed out that as many as 75% of the refugee homeowners in their study paid more than 30% of their household income towards mortgage payments, which indicates that housing affordability remained an issue even after purchasing a home. Furthermore, research suggests that homeownership aspirations vary significantly between different ethnic groups. While Skovgaard Nielsen (2017) found that Somali refugee households had a very low homeownership rate and reported that the participants explained that their religious belief did not allow them to take out a mortgage (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017), Cynthia Mackenzie et al. (2017) showed that, in Congolese culture, owning one's own land is central to creating a sense of spiritual belonging in a new country.

The studies reviewed in this section show that in some Nordic countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, refugees can carve out housing careers within the social rented sectors, whereas in countries such as Canada and Australia, a significant number of refugees succeed in becoming homeowners. The research evidence presented in this section also shows that many refugees rent in the private rental market where they are affected by housing precarity, including living in low-quality, insecure and overcrowded accommodation. In addition, refugees are often at a heightened risk of experiencing homelessness. Up to now, however, little attention has been paid to how refugees navigate this continued housing insecurity.

2.4. The Role of Social Networks in Finding Housing

The literature exploring refugees' search for housing has consistently highlighted the importance of social connections (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Murdie and Logan, 2011), particularly during their early housing journeys, when many refugees have limited knowledge of the local language and the housing market (Flatau et al., 2015). Yet, Murdie and Logan (2011) found that although social networks are important, refugees are less likely to have these networks compared to other immigrant groups. This lack of social connections may be a direct consequence of the asylum process. For example, Bakker et al.'s (2016) research on the British and the Dutch asylum systems found that people who live in asylum accommodations dispersed across the country face difficulties in building personal networks. This finding echoes research in the Irish context, where Finn and Mayock (2022) found that, compared to other migrant groups, refugees were less likely to "have personal networks through which to access local information about housing" (p. 13). Furthermore, in the UK, Strang et al. (2018) found that friends made during the asylum process often lived in insecure housing situations themselves and therefore could not offer access to adequate housing.

In Canada, on the other hand, a study by Carter and Osborne (2009) found that, shortly after arrival, refugees often relied on friends, family and sponsors to assist with their housing search. Similar findings were documented by a later analysis of the first wave of a four-year longitudinal study of Syrian private-sponsored refugees in Quebec: Hanley et al. (2018) reported that family members and friends constituted the most important form of social capital during the early settlement phase and were often critical enablers to them finding housing. However, while Walsh et al. (2016) similarly found that social networks played an important role for newcomer women when accessing housing in Canada, they highlighted that the resulting housing situations were often characterised by severe overcrowding. Similarly, in Vienna, Austria, Aigner (2019) has observed that, in some instances, migrant networks provide access to overcrowded, insecure and overpriced housing.

Social bridges – the connections people have outside their immediate circle of friends and family – have been identified as an important facilitator of access to housing (Aigner, 2019). Adam et al. (2019), for example, as part of their research into refugees' integration into the local housing market in Germany, reported that participants found rooms through chance encounters on the street, through colleagues at work and through contact with volunteers (Adam et al., 2019). Additionally, knowing a local person who

could make contact with a landlord was seen as a particularly valuable asset in the search for housing (Adam et al., 2019). Volunteer networks, which emerged in countries such as Germany and Austria in response to the refugee crisis in 2015-2016, have also been identified as a valuable asset in building local connections (Soederberg, 2019; Viderman and Knierbein, 2018). Aigner's (2019) research, for example, found that the contacts built through volunteering and working with locals opened up access to an informal housing market, which offered affordable and good quality, if often temporary, accommodation.

Next to these informal relationships, the literature has also highlighted the important role of social links with service providers, including local authorities and NGOs, in supporting refugees to find adequate housing (Aigner, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). These links provide information on the housing market as well as support with completing forms and applying for housing supports; support workers sometimes make calls to landlords and organise viewings and, in some cases, even provide housing. Yet, Walsh et al. (2016) found in their qualitative study with newcomer women, including refugee women experiencing insecure housing in Canada, that many women were not aware of these services and the support they provide. It is also important to note that accessing services does not mean that people are able to receive the support they need since many services are not adequately resourced and are severely understaffed. For example, research conducted in Berlin on the provision of accommodation for refugees had documented severe staffing problems, with one staff member tasked with providing refugees with information on the local housing market at a time when 28,000 refugees were searching for housing (Soederberg, 2019). Resources deficits may also result in certain cases being prioritised and lead to unequal treatment. In the UK, Strang et al. (2018) found that female-headed refugee households were likely to exit homelessness accommodation faster than single men because single men were viewed as less in need of support. Similarly, Aigner (2019) reported that NGOs in Austria provided access to housing only to families, whereas single participants, were merely advised about where to look for housing.

Overall, these studies highlight the importance of social networks in providing information on the housing market and, in some instances, in providing access to housing. Yet, these studies also indicate that refugees' access to social networks is restricted during the asylum process. While these studies point to the long-term impact of asylum accommodation on subsequent housing journeys, the mechanisms underpinning this process are not fully understood, thereby underscoring the importance of considering time spent in refugee accommodation as an integral part of refugees' housing journeys.

2.5. Place and Neighbourhood

Neighbourhoods affect a person's housing experience, their sense of well-being, security and belonging (Hebbani et al., 2018; Spicer, 2008; Strang et al., 2018; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021). Ager and Strang (2008) have noted that while academics, policymakers and service providers frequently stress the importance of decent housing conditions, refugees are more likely to emphasise the importance of living in a safe and friendly neighbourhood (Ager and Strang, 2008; Van Liempt and Staring, 2021; Ziersch et al., 2023). Yet, the lack of affordable housing severely constrains refugees' choices regarding location and, in many countries, refugee households often end up living in low-income neighbourhoods that have high rates of crime, theft and a prevalence of more open drug use, leaving them feeling unsafe, anxious and stressed (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Ziersch et al., 2017). As a result, refugees often consider a place to be safe when there is an absence of crime and racialised harassment (Ager and Strang, 2008; Netto, 2011b). The literature examining neighbourhood effects on refugees' housing experiences has studied three different types of neighbourhoods and their effects, distinguished according to their ethnic composition: ethnic enclaves, ethnically diverse and predominantly white neighbourhoods.

In predominately white areas, as Spicer (2008) has reported in the UK, asylum seeker and refugee households commonly experience racialised harassment and abuse – in the streets and in schools – leading them to withdraw from public spaces and spend their time in the private realms of their apartments and houses. Similarly, research on recently-arrived Syrian families in Canada has documented the tendency of refugees to avoid leaving their apartments in order to avoid racialised harassment (Oudshoorn et al. (2019). Although no similar studies have been conducted in Ireland, it is well-recognised that ethnic minorities regularly experience racialised harassment in the streets, on public transport and in social housing estates (Buczowska and Ní Chonail, 2019; McGinnity et al., 2006). Other exclusionary practices can be more subtle, as Larsen (2011) found in her detailed case study of a Congolese refugee family living in a small rural village in Denmark. This case study showed how Danish neighbours perceived neglecting one's garden, keeping the curtains closed or even cooking non-Danish food as a refusal to integrate into the village's social life and, therefore, as presenting a threat to its social order (Larsen, 2011). Various actors, including the landlady, neighbours and social workers, sanctioned perceived deviations from what was considered appropriate behaviour and, as a result, turned the family's private activities into an object of public scrutiny (Larsen, 2011).

While racialised harassment restricts the formation of connections within a neighbourhood, limited knowledge of the local language and cultural barriers have also been shown to impede relationship-building with neighbours and the wider community (Ćatibušić et al., 2019; Hebbani et al., 2018; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Ziersch et al., 2017). While language barriers can be overcome through learning the language, cultural barriers in the form of differing expectations of what constitutes a 'good' neighbourly relationship can continue to be a challenge. In Hebbani et al.'s (2018) qualitative study on refugee households in Brisbane, Australia, for example, participants explained that, in their culture, close and frequent contact between neighbours as well as the regular exchange of practical support were the norm. Yet, these expectations differed considerably from what was deemed 'normal' neighbourly contact in their countries of resettlement, where a good neighbour was more likely to be defined as someone who did not intrude in their privacy (Hebbani et al., 2018). Limited social interactions with neighbours meant that people were more likely to feel lonely and isolated (Hebbani et al., 2018). The importance of relationships with neighbours for refugees' well-being was corroborated by Ziersch et al. (2017), who found that good neighbourly relationships were essential to developing a feeling of ontological security. Although the lack of neighbourly relationships is conventionally considered a barrier to integration (Ager and Strang, 2008), Hebbani et al. (2018) argue that a lack of social networks within a neighbourhood could also be viewed as a form of assimilation to what is common practice in countries of the Global North. Despite these barriers to forming neighbourly relationships, several studies have reported that refugee families frequently attempt to establish connections with locals with the aim of being part of the community and also for practical reasons such as to learn the local language (Oudshoorn et al., 2019).

Several studies have reported that refugees may prefer to live in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods because they offer a higher acceptance of diversity, less racialised harassment and discrimination, and more opportunities to form connections with neighbours, both within and across ethnic groups (Bynner, 2019; Easthope et al., 2018; Levine-Rasky, 2016; Netto, 2011b; Spicer, 2008). The relationships arising from these diverse neighbourhoods can offer various kinds of supports, ranging from emotional support and informal childcare provision to the sharing of information about how to navigate social services (Spicer, 2008). Furthermore, the ethnically diverse schools in these areas are perceived as more inclusive, making it easier for children to make friends and to develop a sense of belonging (Spicer, 2008).

Ethnic enclaves, on the other hand, share the homogeneity of their ethnic composition with White neighbourhoods. Like ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, ethnic enclaves are often perceived as disadvantaged areas. Shared cultural expectations in ethnic enclaves allow people to form close relationships with their neighbours. Two detailed ethnographic studies, one of the close-knit Palestinian community living in social housing in Denmark (Kublitz, 2016), and another of the Eritrean community living in squats in Rome (Belloni, 2016), have highlighted that close ties between neighbours in ethnic enclaves offer a wide range of supports, similar to those experienced in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. While living in an ethnic enclave might be a choice for some who want to live alongside others who share the same culture, living in an ethnic enclave can also be an unintended consequence of searching for affordable housing through ethnic networks (Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017).

Although a recent study in Ireland has demonstrated that there is very little residential segregation along ethnic lines in Ireland (Fahey et al., 2019), ethnic enclaves are often politicised. The Irish government's Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020 states, as one of its aims, the avoidance of 'ghettoization' (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017), thereby framing ethnic enclaves in opposition to successful integration. Easthope et al. (2018) have observed in their study of immigrants' place-based 'advantage' in two Australian gateway cities that ethnically diverse neighbourhoods are often perceived as disadvantaged by policymakers and academics because immigrants who face multiple disadvantages are more likely to settle in these areas. Yet, traditionally, the areas themselves frequently offered many advantages for settlement in the form of affordable housing stock, good public transport links and a vibrant community (Easthope et al., 2018).

The evidence presented in this section suggests that the ethnic composition of neighbourhoods impacts refugees' access to support within a neighbourhood. While predominately White neighbourhoods show an increased prevalence of racialised harassment, ethnically diverse neighbourhoods and ethnic enclaves can provide access to practical and emotional support.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed a large body of research on the housing experiences of refugees in countries of resettlement, spanning the experience of state-provided accommodation during the asylum process to the experience of accessing housing after gaining status. The review of the literature on refugees' housing journeys has highlighted some common

experiences. For example, there is strong evidence that their early housing journeys are shaped by the uncertainty of the asylum process and their restricted housing options while waiting for the outcome of their asylum application. Having gained status, refugees frequently navigate housing markets characterised by the shrinking availability of affordable housing, coupled with rising rents, leading many into precarious housing conditions. Importantly, social networks play a critical role when searching for housing and settling into a new neighbourhood. While a small body of research has focused on the transition from state-provided accommodation to independent living, research to date has not adopted an integrated approach to the analysis of these two fields of housing.

The available research evidence also demonstrates that there is significant variation in terms of dispersal policies and the provision of accommodation during the asylum process, as well as in the availability and accessibility of social housing and/or homeownership once refugees gain status. The available research suggests that these variations result in significant differences in housing outcomes across countries of resettlement. While research from Canada and Australia indicates that some refugees manage to improve their housing situations over time and become homeowners, in countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, refugees succeed in carving out housing journeys within the social rented housing sector. In contrast, research from the UK, Germany and Austria indicates that many refugees become stuck in a cycle of housing precarity. These variations across countries of resettlement highlight the importance of conducting in-depth case studies that relate refugees' housing experiences to the national policy context.

3. Theorising Refugees' Housing Journeys with Bourdieu

This research follows Collins and Stockton (2018) in acknowledging the centrality of theory in guiding the design and analysis of qualitative research. This chapter therefore starts by critically appraising the theoretical approaches underpinning the literature on refugees' housing journeys before outlining the theoretical perspectives that have informed the design, conduct and analysis of the present research. The literature reviewed in the previous chapter showed that research into refugees' housing journeys has, to date, either focused on refugees' lived experience of residing in reception centres or on refugees' attempts at securing housing in the private or social-rented sector, with limited focus on understanding refugees' strategies when navigating the transition between these two distinct fields of housing. This chapter first reviews the theoretical approaches underpinning research into institutionalised forms of refugee reception and their housing journeys. The chapter then introduces Bourdieu's (1977, 2000; 1992) *Theory of Practice* and explores how the concepts of field, habitus, practice and capital can be mobilised to make sense of refugees' experiences and practices when transitioning from Direct Provision to housing.

3.1. Theorising Refugees' Housing Journeys

3.1.1. Refugee Accommodation

The last two decades have seen an increased interest in theorising refugee camps and other forms of institutionalised arrival infrastructures accommodating people seeking asylum (Kreichauf, 2018). This section will discuss: the contribution of Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia and Wacquant's (2007) concept of 'territorial stigmatisation' to current understanding of refugee camps as places of otherness and marginalisation; Agamben's (2000) conceptualisation of refugees as 'bare life' and its relevance to understanding agency within the context of refugee camps; and the concept of liminality and its use in making sense of how these camps impact refugees' idea of self.

Scholars theorising refugee camps have drawn on Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia and Wacquant's (2007) concept of 'territorial stigmatization' to enhance understanding of the nature of these spaces. Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia describes spaces or places that exist in society but operate differently from dominant or considered normal spaces within society. Heterotopias, therefore, represent spaces of otherness in which a different set of rules applies than in the rest of society. When mobilising Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia to analyse life in asylum

accommodation in Germany, Witteborn (2011) found that asylum accommodation serves as “a location of difference, of control (e.g., to keep in or keep out Others), and of not belonging to the nation based on ethnic, racial, national, class, ideological, or other grounds” (p.1151). Although, in his analysis of refugee accommodation in Athens, Berlin, and Copenhagen, Kreichauf (2018) similarly concluded that refugee arrival infrastructures constitute spaces of stigmatisation and otherness, the author drew on Wacquant’s (2007) concept of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ in his analysis. Wacquant (2007) posits that when marginalised groups are concentrated in specific areas, a process of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ is set in motion that adds to the groups’ existing stigmatisation: “A *blemish of place* is thus superimposed on the already existing stigmata traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin” (p. 67, emphasis in original). Applying the concept of ‘territorial stigmatisation’ (Wacquant, 2007), Kreichauf (2018) noted that, by living in stigmatised refugee camps, refugees are seen as living outside of societal norms, which in turn exacerbates fears and fosters racist attitudes in the wider community.

While the literature on refugee camps is broadly in agreement that this ‘territorial stigmatisation’ negatively impacts refugees’ well-being (Kreichauf, 2018; Witteborn, 2011), there is less agreement as to what extent these spaces constrain refugees’ agency. Agamben’s (1998) seminal work titled *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* has been particularly influential in the debate about refugees’ agency. When conceptualising refugees as *homo sacer* or ‘bare life’, Agamben (1998) drew on Foucault’s (1978) concept of biopower. Foucault (1978) defined biopower as a modern mode of power that seeks to govern and influence society in its entirety through a range of mechanisms and techniques that include social policy and the welfare state. Building on the work of Foucault (1978), Agamben (2000) argued that refugee camps constitute permanent ‘states of exception’ that function outside of the normal rule of law. In these camps, Agamben (1998) posits, refugees’ lives are stripped of all political and legal protections and reduced to mere biological existence, which he called ‘bare life’. Yet, scholars such as Walters (2008) and Lentin (2015) have cautioned that Agamben’s conceptualisation of refugees as ‘bare life’ negates refugees’ agency. Walters (2008), for example, emphasised that the conceptualisation of refugees’ lives as bare life risks viewing refugees as “subjects to whom all manner of things are done, often in arbitrary and violent ways, but rarely agents in their own right” (Walters, 2008, p.188). In his examination of refugees’ agency within a refugee camp near Calais, France, the author concluded that attempts to move freely, such as crossing the border to the UK, can be understood as examples of autonomous migration

that undermine state efforts to control such migration. Lentin (2015), on the other hand, in her analysis of the political activism of asylum seekers living in DP centres in Ireland, notes that Agamben's (2000) conceptualisation of bare life cannot sufficiently account for the political agency that refugees demonstrated, for instance, when they had organised hunger strikes to protest against the living conditions in DP centres. In brief, while the stigmatising impact of life in institutionalised arrival structures is well established, existing theoretical approaches do not sufficiently account for refugees' agency within these settings.

Another strand of literature analysing life in refugee camps has mobilised the concept of liminality (Brun and Fábos, 2015; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010; O'Reilly, 2018) to advance understanding of time spent in asylum accommodation. The anthropological concept of "liminality", derived from the work of Arnold van Gennep (1960) and later popularised by Victor Turner (1987), refers to a phase within a social process during which individuals or groups experience a state of ambiguity, transition, and marginality, as they move from one status or position to another within a society or culture. In her analysis of refugees' lived experiences in DP centres in Ireland, O'Reilly (2018) demonstrated that life in refugee camps is underpinned by spatial as well as temporal liminality. Whereas spatial liminality is represented by life in an institutionalised and othered space, temporal liminality results from the uncertainty of the asylum process (O'Reilly, 2018). O'Reilly (2018) observed that refugees who experience this spatial and temporal liminality over many years develop a sense of 'ontological liminality', which the author defined as "the internalized sense of being a liminal being, where an 'in between' existence becomes part of one's identity and everyday lived experience" (p.834). Applying the concept of liminality, O'Reilly (2018) was therefore able to show how refugee camps not only impact refugees' agency but, importantly, also their sense of self.

While the application of concepts such as heterotopia, territorial stigmatisation and liminality have expanded our awareness of refugee camps as stigmatised, othered and marginalised spaces with profound impacts on refugees' sense of self, the extent to which these spaces limit refugees' agency remains contested.

3.1.2. Housing Careers, Class and Pathways

Historically, research on immigrants' and ethnic minorities' housing and neighbourhood experiences in Europe and the US has tended to focus on questions of social cohesion and ethnic segregation (Dahya, 1974; Park, 1915; Rex et al., 1967; V. Robinson, 1981; Sarre et al.,

1989). Yet, from the 1950s onwards, inspired by rational choice theory, a new strand of research – which became known as the housing career approach – emerged and was distinct in terms of the far greater emphasis the approach placed on individual household movements within constrained housing markets (L. A. Brown and Moore, 1970; Clark, 1982; Kendig, 1984). The housing career approach analyses the mobility decisions of households and the sequence of dwellings they inhabit. Importantly, household mobility was located and examined in the context of the wider life course, including events such as family formation, professional and educational careers, and migration processes (Kendig, 1984; Peter H. Rossi, 1980; Peter H Rossi and Shlay, 1982). According to this understanding, a housing career follows a cyclical pattern comprising “moves from renting to owning, as people become more settled and permanency becomes more important, moves from flats to houses during the childbearing years, and possible moves back to flats in old age” (Kendig, 1984, p.272).

The housing career approach has proven popular in the study of immigrants’ housing movements (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Magnusson Turner and Hedman, 2014; Murdie, 2002; Özüekren and Van Kempen, 2002; Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017). Applying the housing career approach, Bolt and Van Kempen (2002) found that a combination of factors impacted the housing careers of Turks and Moroccans in the city of Utrecht (Netherlands), including economic crises, discriminatory exclusion from social housing, family reunification, family composition, lack of financial resources and age. Interestingly, this study also found that participants frequently moved from owner-occupied to social rented housing; while these moves stood in contradiction to what is often considered a ‘normal’ housing career consisting of moves from rented to owner-occupied housing (Kendig, 1984), Turks and Moroccans nonetheless viewed their housing career favourably because it improved affordability. Similarly, in an examination of Turkish labour migrants’ and Somali refugees’ housing careers in the Copenhagen social housing sector, Skovgaard Nielsen (2017) found that these households’ housing careers did not end with refugees’ entering the social rented sector. Instead, accessing social housing marked the start of a housing career in which households strived to improve their housing situation in line with their needs by moving within the social rented sector. These findings are important in revealing that what constitutes a successful housing career depends on the particular economic and political context (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017).

Furthermore, applications of the housing career approach have also drawn attention to the resources households mobilise as part of their housing careers. In their

seminal article, Özüekren and Van Kempen (2002) explored the adoption of the housing careers approach to the study of minority ethnic groups. The authors argued that housing careers are impacted by the household's strength in the housing market and that this strength derives from a mix of financial, cognitive, social and political resources: 'financial resources' span wage income, savings and homeownership; 'cognitive resources' refer to a person's education and skills, as well as the person's knowledge of the housing market; 'political resources' signify access to formal rights such as the right to work; and, lastly, 'social resources' encompass connections to people who can facilitate access to housing as well as connections within a neighbourhood (Özüekren and Van Kempen, 2002). This conceptualisation of resources has been applied by a number of scholars when researching immigrants' and refugees' housing journeys (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). In their analysis of refugees' access to housing in rural regions of Germany, Weidinger and Kordel (2023), for instance, found that knowledge of the local housing market, as well as social connections to a range of actors such as volunteers and local authority staff, were essential in facilitating refugee households' access to housing. While Van Kempen and Özüekren's (2002) identification of these four types of resources is clearly valuable in understanding those resources drawn on by households when accessing housing, the authors offer no explanation of the mechanism underpinning the acquisition of these resources.

While the housing career approach produced a more nuanced understanding of household preferences and resources when accessing housing, another school of thought – referred to as New Urban Sociology – emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, placing a stronger emphasis on the constraints that people encounter when navigating housing markets. (Bernt et al., 2022; Rex et al., 1967). This new theoretical perspective focused on enhancing understanding of how housing markets can (re)produce class, and also on how housing markets can perpetuate spatial configurations of class. Rex et al.'s (1967) seminal case study *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook*, proved particularly influential. Based on a neo-Weberian analysis, Rex et al. (1967) argued that class is not only dependent on a person's position within the labour market but also on their position within the housing market, prompting the authors to introduce the term 'housing class' to capture the social inequality produced by housing markets and its gatekeepers. Examining the housing situations of immigrant groups from Pakistan, the West Indies, and India in Birmingham, Rex et al. (1967) findings revealed that discriminatory practices by gatekeepers obstructed individuals' ability to access homeownership and local

authority housing, consequently leading to the concentration of these groups in Birmingham's inner city, where housing quality was low but rents remained affordable. More recently, the role of housing gatekeepers in creating spatial inequalities has also been analysed by Bernt et al. (2022), in their analysis of refugees' housing journeys in various German cities. The authors discovered that refugees often depend on the assistance of informal agents who are part of an internal migration industry. These agents then connect refugees with specific housing providers or landlords, who offer accommodations in a small number of neighbourhoods, resulting in a spatial concentration of refugee households (Bernt et al., 2022). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the New Urban Sociology in detail, these examples illustrate that housing markets and their intermediaries can perpetuate social inequality through processes linked to the spatial concentration of disadvantaged households.

While the New Urban Sociology focused attention on the structural constraints shaping refugees' housing journeys, Clapham (2002, 2005) cautioned that this theoretical perspective offered little explanation of how these constraints relate to household's attitudes and preferences, and therefore "lack a convincing focus on the behaviour of the actors in the housing system" (Clapham, 2005, p.10). Instead, Clapham (2002, 2005) proposed the concept of housing pathway, which he defines as "the social practices of a household relating to housing over time and space" (Clapham, 2005, p. 34). Clapham's (2002, 2005) concept of housing pathway builds on the housing career approach, discussed earlier in this section, by integrating aspects of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social constructionism as well as Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration. Inspired by social constructionism, Clapham (2002) emphasises that reality is always constructed through social interactions. In this view, language as an enabler of social interactions becomes central, with Clapham asserting that: "meaning is produced, reproduced, altered and transformed through language and discourse" (Clapham, 2002, p.61). To address the criticism that social constructionism tends to neglect the macro-structures that shape these interactions at a micro-level (Dreher, 2018), Clapham (2002) draws on Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, which asserts that human agency produces and reproduces the structures which, in turn, guide human action. While Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration offers a valuable theoretical lens through which to conceptualise the relationship between agency and structure, Clapham (2002) was especially drawn to this theory due to its emphasis on social practices located in time and space, which he viewed as particularly attractive for the study of housing. In considering the theory of social

constructionism as well as Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, Clapham (2002, 2005) concluded that the housing career approach's focus on households' preferences and life course events was not sufficient to explain households' housing trajectories. Instead, Clapham (2002) builds on the housing career approach by including social interactions, identities and meanings associated with each housing location in the analysis of housing practices and pathways.

Building on Giddens (1991), Clapham (2005) notes that a household's housing pathway is closely interlinked with that household's life plans. Life planning is here understood as the pursuit of identity formation and self-fulfilment in relation to housing but also other areas such as employment and/or family formation (Clapham, 2002). Giddens (1991) posits that in the context of the declining importance of traditional institutions such as the family or the community, individualism and lifestyle choices become more significant in guiding a person's life planning and practices. In this view, "individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options" (Giddens, 1991, p 5). As a result, lifestyle choices and processes of identity formation become central to understanding housing pathways (Clapham, 2002). Drawing on the work of Taylor (1998), Clapham (2002) distinguished between two types of identities: categorical and ontological identities. Categorical identities refer to the identities that are assigned to a person by society or themselves and include categories such as a person's gender, class, ethnicity or tenure status, whereas ontological identity refers to a person's identity of self (Clapham, 2002; Taylor, 1998). Clapham (2002) explains that these categorical identities serve as mediators between a person's identity of self and the wider structural discourses present in society. In this view, the interrelation between structural discourses, categorical and ontological identity plays a key role in understanding households' housing pathways.

Clapham's housing pathway approach has been increasingly applied within research on the housing journeys of immigrants (Balampanidis, 2020; Eskelä, 2018; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Portley, 2015; D. Robinson et al., 2007) and refugees (Aigner, 2019; Netto, 2011a; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). Importantly, for the purpose of this thesis, Clapham (2005) identifies junctions in housing pathways and the factors associated with these junctions as central analytical foci. In an examination of refugees' housing experiences in the UK, Netto (2011a) applied the housing pathways approach to study refugees' housing experiences when gaining refugee status since this moment represents a significant junction in their pathways. In the UK, refugee households are evicted from

asylum accommodation into homelessness after a period of 28 days post gaining status. Analysing processes of identity formation at this junction in refugees' housing journeys, Netto (2011a) found that, in order to access emergency accommodation, refugee households had to identify as 'homeless' to gain access to supports and that some refugees struggled to accept this newly assigned identity, which in turn negatively impacted their interactions with support workers. While the housing pathway approach proved useful, in the context of this study, in drawing attention to interactions and processes of identity negotiation at pathway junctions, prioritising processes of identity formation bears the risk of shifting the focus of analysis from structural to individual explanatory factors. The literature review presented in the previous chapter demonstrates that refugees' housing journeys are severely constrained by tight housing markets characterised by discriminatory lending practices and low affordability. In this context, an emphasis on lifestyle choices and identity formation, albeit understood in relation to dominant structural discourses, does not appear to be the best fit to theorise refugees' housing journeys. Rather, a theoretical framework is needed that focuses attention on the inequalities and power dynamics shaping these structural constraints and how they, in turn, impact refugees' practices, interactions, and identity formation. Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, offers a theoretical approach that can further our understanding of how structures of inequality are produced and reproduced, and, importantly, how these structures shape, and are simultaneously shaped by, human practices, identities, and relationships.

Summarising, the theoretical perspectives provided by the housing career approach, the New Urban Sociology and the housing pathways approach have advanced understanding of refugees' housing journeys in a number of significant ways. The housing career approach, for example, focuses attention on interactions between housing with the life course, household preferences and resources. The New Urban Sociology draws attention to the interplay between housing and class, while the housing pathways approach shifts the focus to pathway junctions, household practices, interactions, and processes of identity formation.

3.1.3. *Housing Integration*

Integration frameworks constitute another theoretical perspective often applied in the studies of refugees' housing journeys. In their review of the theoretical perspectives informing integration theory, Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore (2018) noted that "analyses of integration have largely been empirically and practically driven, and

particularly focused on narrow determinants and outcomes” (p. 187/188). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that a substantial number of the studies reviewed for Chapter Two were solely empirical and not guided by a specific theoretical framework. Yet, in the mid-2000s, this theoretical lacuna was addressed by the emergence of two new theoretical frameworks that proved hugely influential in the study of integration processes: the integration framework proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) and the concept of superdiversity introduced by Vertovec (2007). When Ager and Strang (2008) were tasked with developing an instrument to assess the efficacy of integration initiatives in the UK, they aimed to develop a tool that acknowledges functional as well as social aspects of integration. The outcome of this work was an integration framework, presented by Ager and Strang (2008) as an inverted pyramid comprising ten interrelated dimensions, with ‘Rights and Citizenship’ constituting its foundation stone. On the second level of the framework, facilitators of successful integration were said to include ‘Cultural Knowledge and Language’ and ‘Safety and Stability’. The third level then represented the three forms of social connection, including ‘Social Bridges’, ‘Social Bonds’ and ‘Social Links’. And lastly, at the top of the framework, employment, housing, education, and health represented the markers and means of integration. Several studies examining refugees’ housing journeys have mobilised this framework in order to analyse refugees’ housing journeys, offering rich empirical analyses of individual agency and the structures shaping actions (Adam et al., 2019; Strang et al., 2018; Ziersch et al., 2017). For example, Adam et al.’s (2019) exploration of the processes underpinning the housing integration of refugees in Germany, found that social bonds, in the form of connections to friends and relatives, as well as social bridges to volunteers and language teachers, were particularly useful in providing information about vacant apartments and facilitating connections to prospective landlords, thereby aiding refugees’ integration into the housing market (Adam et al., 2019).

Yet, while studies applying integration theory have provided empirically rich case studies, they have also been critiqued for remaining too strongly focused on legal and/or ethnic categories, thereby neglecting other important factors such as class and gender (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). To address this criticism, Vertovec (2007) introduced the concept of superdiversity, which draws attention not only to ethnic diversity but also diversity in terms of gender, economic situation, legal status, religion and language, to capture the complex interplay between economic and social relations. Importantly, Vertovec (2007) aims to “stimulate social scientists to creatively consider the interaction of multiple axes of differentiation” (p.1049). The concept of superdiversity has proven

hugely popular within migration studies and researchers have drawn on the concept to advance understanding of migrants' settlement experiences, including their housing journeys (Bynner, 2019; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Strang et al., 2018). Finn and Mayock (2022), for example, mobilised the concept to demonstrate how immigration status, gender, employment and family intersected to influence immigrants' housing journeys in a rural Irish town. Writing about refugees gaining status in the UK, Strang et al. (2018) investigated the interaction between this transition in legal status with gender, and showed how female headed households were more likely to receive access to housing than single males. Nonetheless, while the concept has been useful in producing a deeper understanding of the housing journeys of refugees, it has been critiqued for not integrating the knowledge gained from postcolonial and critical race studies, leading to a situation where "all inequalities, all racism and all domination that precedes 'diversity' again disappear from view" (Schinkel, 2018, p.10).

Overall, the theoretical perspectives applied to the study of refugee camps, as well as approaches informed by housing studies and integration theory, have been influential and valuable in furthering understanding of refugees' housing journeys. Yet, within these theoretical approaches, consideration of *both* the refugee accommodation experience and the experience of accessing accommodation in the private/social rented housing market sectors in understanding refugees' housing journeys is largely absent. The following sections introduce Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* and discuss how the application of this theory to refugees' housing journeys can support an integrated analysis of refugees' housing journeys, particularly in terms of understanding the transition from DP to housing as a transition between two distinct fields of housing.

3.2. Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

As discussed above, several theoretical perspectives have guided and informed existing research and scholarship on the housing experiences of refugees. However, as argued, to date, no theoretical framework has been applied to the study of refugees' housing journeys that spans both fields of housing; namely, the field of refugee accommodation and the field of the private and/or social rented sectors. Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* offers a theoretical perspective that has the potential to bridge this gap by furthering an integrated understanding of refugees' housing journeys. The following section argues that Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* provides a theoretical framework that permits an analysis of refugees' housing journeys as a transition between two distinct fields of housing: the field of refugee accommodation and the field of the private rental sector, drawing attention to how each

field shapes refugees' habitus and practice. The section will further suggest that gaining refugee status not only represents a change in legal status but also, importantly, a transition in symbolic capital. Lastly, the role of cultural and social capital in understanding refugees' access to housing is discussed. To begin, however, a short introduction to the genesis of Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* is presented.

3.2.1. *Fields, Habitus and Practice*

While, today, Bourdieu is known as a cultural sociologist, he initially studied philosophy and, after completing his studies, taught himself anthropological methods and theory inspired by the anthropologist and structuralist Levi-Strauss (Joas and Knöbl, 2009). When stationed as a French soldier in the Kabylia region in Algeria during the War of Independence, Bourdieu applied this learning in his ethnographic fieldwork (Wacquant, 2004). Although Bourdieu initially followed a structural tradition and focused his study of social practices within the Kabyle society on kinship patterns, he soon realised that the structures or rules that people follow are not as straightforward as proposed by structuralists: rules could be manipulated and they were only followed when they served an underlying interest, which added an element of unpredictability to human action (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's work in Kabylia was crucial to the development of his theoretical concepts, such as habitus. He observed that the villagers' habitus, the ingrained set of dispositions, beliefs, and practices they acquired through socialisation, played a significant role in perpetuating their social positions and preserving the existing power structures. Bourdieu's research in Kabylia sparked a number of writings, culminating in the publication of an *Outline of a Theory of Practice* in 1972, which introduced the concepts of habitus, field, capital and practice.

In this work, Bourdieu (1977) emphasised that practice is always located within fields, meaning that habitus and the use of different forms of capital need to be analysed in the context of these fields (Bourdieu, 1977; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu himself analysed a variety of fields, including the bureaucratic, academic, artistic and housing fields. For instance, in *The Social Structures of the Economy*, Bourdieu (2005) studied the French housing market as a field of housing and examined the relations underpinning this field, including the interactions between various housing consumers and market actors such as housing developers. Although this work was important in drawing attention to how housing fields structure agents' practices, Boterman (2012) noted that "Bourdieu says surprisingly little about the mechanisms by which individual households access their homes" (p. 324). Despite of this omission, several housing

researchers have mobilised Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* to study access to housing (Aigner, 2019; Boterman, 2012; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015). These studies and their contributions will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter.

3.2.1.1. *Field Relations*

Bourdieu (1977) posits that practices are always located within fields and understands fields as relational spaces. The authors insist that “what exists in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations” (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992, p.97). Bourdieu (1977), therefore, contends that observed interactions are derived from objective relations:

“To describe the process of objectification and orchestration in the language of interaction itself owes its form to the objective structures which have produced the dispositions of the interacting agents and which allot them their relative positions in the interaction and elsewhere.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.81).

In other words, the interactions that can be observed are evidence of the objective relations that determine each agent's position within a specific field. Considering the literature on refugees' housing journeys discussed in Chapter Two, a number of housing fields are of particular importance, including the field of state-provided refugee accommodation, the field of the private rental market, the field of emergency homelessness accommodation, and the field of the social rented sector. Each of these fields of accommodation is constituted by a distinct set of relations.

Applying this view to the field of refugee accommodation, for example, the literature review highlighted the importance of the relations to centre management/staff as well as to other centre residents. Hewson (2022), for instance, in his study of life in Direct Provision centres, explored the relations between residents and centre staff/management and found that this relationship was characterised by a system of surveillance as well as the normalisation of judgment, which operated through mechanisms of punishments and rewards. Once refugees enter the private rental market, relations with landlords become particularly important. For instance, Chisholm et al. (2020), in their review of literature on housing quality issues among tenants in the US, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, found that landlord/tenant relationships are underpinned by visible, hidden, and invisible power dynamics. In their understanding, instances of tenants facing consequences like rent increases or evictions after complaining to landlords about housing quality demonstrate visible power dynamics, while tenants

who refrain from complaining due to their fear of negative consequences represent hidden power dynamics. The authors also note that invisible power dynamics are at play when tenants accept poor housing quality as natural and unworthy of challenge (Chisholm et al., 2020). Following Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992), understanding these different types of relations, and the power dynamics underpinning them, is central to understanding the constitution or structure of any field of housing.

3.2.1.2. *Adapting Practice and Habitus to a Field*

Another key characteristic of fields, Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992) contend, is that each field follows its own logic or rules of the game, which specify what is at stake (e.g. securing a tenancy in the field of the private rental market) and what forms of capital are required to succeed (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). For a field to function according to these rules, agents need to believe in the value of the game and, to describe this, Bourdieu uses the term *illusio*, which refers to agents' "fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes" (Bourdieu, 2000, p.11). Bourdieu observes that these rules of the game are commonly perceived as 'natural' by agents and, as a result, remain unchallenged. Furthermore, Bourdieu posits that entering a field triggers an 'immediate adherence' to these unspoken rules, which is crucial for a field's reproduction.

This immediate adherence to the unspoken rules, or *doxa*, that underpin a specific field is well illustrated by a recent study by Cook and Hole (2020), who examined the practices of people experiencing street homelessness in Kelowna, Canada. For people experiencing street homelessness, relations with service providers were critical to their ability to access to services and support. In their research, Cook and Hole (2020) found that the people who become homeless have to adapt their practice to the field of homelessness by presenting themselves "in particular ways based on what the service agency expected of them as a homeless person" (p. 826). The authors described how this adaptation in practice involved emphasising certain elements of their identity as a homeless person; for example, by playing up their health-related issues or emphasising their vulnerability, always with the aim of appearing appropriately deserving of support services (Cook and Hole, 2020). This example illustrates how agents adapt their practice to a newly encountered field, in this case, to the field of emergency homelessness accommodation. Bourdieu posits that an agent "engages in strategies that are 'practical' in the dual sense of implicit – i.e. non-theoretical – and expedient – i.e. adapted to the exigencies and urgent pressures of action" (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 9). In other words, these

actions follow a practical logic based on the agents' individual experience of the field (Aigner, 2019).

While entering a field triggers this immediate adaptation of practice, gradually fields also alter the agents' structuring dispositions (or habitus). Bourdieu defines habitus as a set of structuring dispositions that guide a person's actions. Yet, in contrast to structuralists, he maintained that these structuring dispositions are not universal but rather derived from the particular historical and cultural context in which a person has been socialised (Joas and Knöbl, 2009). One of the main characteristics of the habitus is that it is inert: "there is an inertia (or hysteresis) of habitus which have a spontaneous tendency (based in biology) to perpetuate structures corresponding to their conditions of production" (Bourdieu, 2000, p.160), which means that dispositions formed during socialisations are not easily transformed. While people who remain in the social world in which they have been socialised can trust that their dispositions are aligned with the fields they live in, people who are socially mobile experience a mismatch between habitus and field, and find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to continuously correct their behaviour so that it is appropriate to their new position (Bourdieu, 2000).

However, while socialisation begins in childhood within the context of family relations, this process of socialisation continues throughout the life course. This means that upon entering a new field, the habitus does tend to adapt "gradually, progressively and imperceptibly" (Bourdieu, 2000, p.11) to the new field. O'Reilly's (2018) research into the lived experiences of refugees living in DP provides a particularly pertinent example of how habitus gradually adapts to a newly encountered field. The author observed that the spatial and temporal liminality experienced by refugees living in the field of DP means that they internalise a sense of 'ontological liminality' into their being. This finding illustrates that entering the field of refugee accommodation profoundly impacts refugees' habitus.

Yet, Bourdieu (1986) also notes that this adaptation is a two-way process: the field structures social practice and habitus but, at the same time, the field is also shaped by agents' actions taken within a field (Bourdieu, 1986). It follows that the field is not a static space, but can be shaped by actors who have the ability "to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992, p.99). A pertinent example of how refugees are shaping the field of DP is that the continued political activism of DP residents in Ireland, organised by groups such as MASI, contributed to changing the field of DP in Ireland, culminating in the Irish Government'

publication of the White Paper in 2021, which includes the stated aim of ending the current system of DP (Coakley and MacEinri, 2022; Lentin, 2015). In short, while a field profoundly impacts social practice and habitus of agents, the actions of these agents, in turn, also shape the field they are situated in.

This section has outlined how the concepts of field, habitus and practice can be mobilised to understand practice and habitus situated within distinct fields. As highlighted, each field follows its own logic and is underpinned by a set of objective relations that structure interactions within a specific field. Importantly, this section has demonstrated that while agents can quickly adapt their practices to a newly encountered field, their habitus changes only slowly, potentially leading to a mismatch between field and habitus. Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of field, habitus and practice therefore direct analytic attention to the processes of adaptation in practice and habitus in each distinct field of housing.

3.2.2. *Gaining Status as a Symbolic Transition*

Having considered the interplay of field, habitus and practice, this section now turns to consider the field of the State. The field of the State is particularly significant for refugees' housing journeys since the transition in legal status, from asylum seeker to refugee, is triggered by a bureaucratic decision, with profound impacts on refugees' symbolic position within society.

The field of the state (or the bureaucratic field), Bourdieu emphasises, is one of the most powerful fields and therefore warrants particular consideration. In *Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field*, Bourdieu traces the emergence of the state as a field of power that developed from the "concentration of different species of capital: capital of physical force or instruments of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural or (better) informational capital, and symbolic capital" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.5, emphasis in original). By accumulating these different forms of capital, the state acquires a form of meta-capital, which Bourdieu also refers to as statist capital (or capital *etatique*), which gives the state the power to interfere in other fields like the economy or the housing market (Bourdieu et al., 1994). The importance of physical force, when defending and/or extending a state's territory or when repressing dominated classes, was well-recognised by state theorists like Max Weber, Norbert Elias and Karl Marx (Loyal and Quilley, 2017). Yet, Bourdieu insists that a monopoly on physical violence is not sufficient to explain the development of state power; rather, he argues that for the centralisation of

physical and economic capital to be possible, people had to recognise the state as a legitimate form of power (Bourdieu et al., 1994). Bourdieu notes that since establishing a state's symbolic legitimacy is closely intertwined with developing a national identity, nationalism plays a key role in strengthening this symbolic legitimacy (Bourdieu et al., 1994).

Once the state's legitimacy is recognised, the state has the symbolic power to impose "durable principles of vision and division that conform to its own structure" (Bourdieu, 1994, p.9). Juridical capital plays a key role in exercising this symbolic power since it represents "objectified symbolic capital, codified, delegated and guaranteed by the state, in a word *bureaucratized*" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.11, emphasis in original). Bureaucratic actions, like a doctor signing a medical certificate or a president signing a decree into law, draws on the symbolic capital that is "accumulated in and through the whole network of relations of recognition constitutive of the bureaucratic universe" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.11-12). These bureaucratic actions thus create state-guaranteed social identities, which can include being a citizen, statutory homeless, an asylum seeker or a property owner, and define in the end what constitutes a legitimate group (e.g., a family) as well as the corresponding rights and duties that go with it. Bourdieu posits that:

"by stating with authority what a being (thing or person) is in truth (verdict) according to its socially legitimate definition, that is what he or she is authorized to be, what he has a right (and duty) to be, the social being that he may claim, the State wields a genuinely creative, quasi-divine, power" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.12).

National immigration regimes are a fitting illustration of how the state imposes these durable principles of vision and division: states have created a system of immigration statuses that come with varying rights and duties attached and also have symbolic value (Meissner, 2018; Zetter, 2007). In his seminal article considering the bureaucratic processes underpinning the labelling of refugees, Zetter (2007) emphasised that the label of asylum seeker is not a mere legal category but rather represents a label loaded with negative connotations:

"labels like 'dispersed asylum seeker' also transform an identity into something which conforms to the populist and politicized image of the label--destitute, dependent, above all an alien because they have no right to belong" (Zetter, 2007, p.186).

Drawing on Bourdieu et al. (1999), Garrett (2015) similarly concluded in his analysis of minority ethnic populations in Ireland, that the concentration, containment and confinement of asylum seekers in DP means that asylum seekers are freighted with ‘negative symbolic capital’ (p. 422). This concept of negative symbolic capital is useful in understanding the stigmatising effect of bureaucratic labels. Bourdieu et al. (1994) defines symbolic capital as:

“any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value” (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.8).

In other words, symbolic capital represents a form of social recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). Yet, symbolic capital can also take the form of negative symbolic capital. For example, being part of a highly stigmatised group, like living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, being an asylum seeker or experiencing homelessness, is associated with negative symbolic capital (Barker, 2013; Bourdieu, 2000; Farrugia, 2011; Garrett, 2015). In the *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu (2000) argues that this unequal distribution of symbolic capital or worthiness within society is a particularly inhumane form of inequality that impacts the mental well-being of individuals who are assigned negative symbolic capital.

A pertinent example of the consequences of such bureaucratically imposed categorisations can be found in the ethnographic account of refugee hotspots in the Aegean Sea. Spathopoulou et al. (2020) describe how vulnerability assessments differentiate refugees arriving on the Greek islands into two categories: “either divested of agency as a subject of forced migration, let alone as a ‘vulnerable’ subject, or invested with agency as a subject of economic migration” (p.12). While refugees deemed vulnerable receive access to services, refugees who are deemed to be economic migrants are left with minimal support and pressured to return to their home countries. The authors conclude that this categorisation is itself an act of violence since it divides people arriving in these hotspots into “separate spheres of recognition, regulation, and control, but also different spaces – what we term uneven geographies of vulnerability – of institutionalised waiting and coerced mobility” (p. 20). Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the state and his concept of symbolic capital provide useful tools to make sense of transitions in legal status, not just in terms of access to rights, but also in terms of how it symbolically positions people within

a nation-state. However, while gaining status means that the burden of the negative symbolic capital of being an asylum seeker is lifted, most will experience a new form of negative symbolic capital connected to being welfare beneficiaries and living in poverty.

3.2.3. *Social Positions and Forms of Capital*

While the previous section explored the role of the state in creating bureaucratic identities, this section examines, more closely, the role of capital in defining agents' positions within a field. Specifically, this section explores how the concepts of cultural and social capital can be mobilised to make sense of refugees' housing search practices.

A central tenet of Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* is that an agent's position within a field is determined by the volume and type of economic, social and cultural capital available to them and thereby determines whether an agent is able to succeed in a particular field (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992, p.96). While economic capital refers to financial means and can be utilised to buy goods and services, Bourdieu is particularly known for emphasising the significance of cultural and social capital and their convertibility into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The literature review presented in Chapter Two identified the lack of affordable housing, combined with refugees' lack of economic capital, as the principal barrier for refugees when attempting to secure housing. The importance of economic capital to social inequality is well recognised since the late 19th century. Drawing a distinction between the owners of property and the means of production, on one hand, and workers on the other, Marx (1974) was particularly influential in positioning economic capital at the centre of sociological research, inspiring a vast body of scholarship on how wealth and income inequality continue to (re)produce a stratified society (Grusky, 2019). Not surprisingly, access to housing has often been seen as closely interlinked to the availability of economic capital and, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, housing markets have been considered to play a key role in the reproduction of class (Rex et al., 1967).

However, there are various reasons why access to economic capital cannot sufficiently explain access to housing and, therefore, refugees' housing journeys. First, housing fields such as the social rented sector and state-provided forms of refugee accommodation represent decommodified forms of housing provision that are not governed by market principles but rather by state-controlled allocation mechanisms (Boterman, 2012). Second, the literature review presented in Chapter Two demonstrates that while the lack of economic capital fundamentally limits refugees' housing options,

other factors, such as access to social networks, knowing the local language and knowing how to navigate the housing market play a central role when refugees search for housing. While Bourdieu insists that economic capital remains the most important form of capital in determining a person's position in society, he also argues that the concept is not sufficient to account for the diverse social positions people occupy, prompting him to introduce the concepts of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage et al., 2005).

3.2.3.1. *Cultural Capital*

Housing and Migration scholars have repeatedly drawn attention to how knowledge and education shape housing journeys and housing search (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Boterman, 2012; Bridge, 2006; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Moret, 2018; Özüekren and Van Kempen, 2002; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). This section presents a discussion of how Bourdieu (1986) developed the concept of 'cultural capital' in response to Gerry Becker's Human Capital theory and how the concept of cultural capital has been applied in housing and migration research to understand housing search and residential mobility practices.

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital can be understood as a direct response to the theory of human capital developed by Gary Becker. During the 20th century, scholars grew increasingly interested in the impact of education on economic productivity, prompting Gary Becker to develop the theory of human capital. At the core of human capital theory lies the idea that investment in education and training increases a person's economic productivity and that employers reward this increased productivity with higher wages, thereby incentivising people to invest more resources into extending their human capital (Becker, 1964). Bourdieu (1986) highlighted two major weaknesses associated with human capital theory: first, he argued that the theory failed to explain how ability and investment in educational achievements came about in the first place; and, second, he pointed out that educational achievements were not sufficient in themselves to produce economic success unless they were employed in combination with social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). To address these weaknesses, Bourdieu (1986) developed the concept of cultural capital, which was subsequently applied by scholars to explain housing search and mobility practices (Boterman, 2012; Bridge, 2006; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015; Huang et al., 2018; Moret, 2018)

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised cultural capital as encompassing three different types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalised forms of capital.

Embodied cultural capital¹⁸, according to Bourdieu, plays a key role in processes of social reproduction since it refers to the educational and cultural knowledge a person accumulates from birth, primarily through socialisation. Acquiring new knowledge, for example, by learning a new craft or language, requires a substantial investment of time and frequently competes with other time-consuming necessities like earning a living. Hence, the longer a person can rely on financial support from their family, the more time is available to them to invest in building this embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Objectified cultural capital then describes a wide range of cultural artefacts that have material as well as symbolic value and can include musical instruments, books or artworks. While these objects can be acquired when sufficient economic capital is available, their use or appropriation requires specific embodied cultural capital. For example, a person might be able to buy a painting but would need embodied knowledge of art history to understand the symbolic value of the painting. Finally, the institutional state of cultural capital refers to educational qualifications that certify a person's cultural competence in a legally guaranteed manner (Bourdieu, 1986).

For the purpose of this research the concept of embodied cultural capital is of particular interest because knowledge of the local language and/or the housing market – both central to securing housing – can be understood as a form of embodied cultural capital (Aigner, 2019; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015). Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has thus also found application in housing research. Boterman (2012), for example, drew on Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* to examine the mechanisms that drive middle-class households' access to housing in the Netherlands. The authors observed that when it came to highly regulated fields like the field of social housing, economists' explanations of demand and supply were not sufficient to explain the mechanisms associated with "who has access to what types of housing" (p. 323). Instead, Boterman (2012) found that, in order to access affordable and decommodified housing provided by housing associations and cooperatives, middle class households draw on a combination of waiting time, criminal capital (willingness to break the rules) and cultural capital in the form of knowing the field and its rules (Boterman, 2012).

While cultural capital has been shown to play a critical role in explaining access to housing, research from the field of education has cautioned that there is a tendency among

¹⁸ At times, Bourdieu termed this embodied form of cultural capital 'dispositions of mind' (Bourdieu 1986).

scholars to explain social inequalities with reference to agents' lack of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). In her analysis of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in the field of education research, Yosso (2005) observed that in studies where a lack of cultural capital is used to explain social inequality, cultural capital is often defined solely in terms of 'White, middle-class values' (Yosso, 2005). Similarly, the literature on refugees' housing journeys presented in Chapter Two frequently emphasises refugees' lack of knowledge of the local language as the main barrier of access to housing. This focus on language acquisition is likely to be a direct consequence of the influence of integration theory, which has traditionally emphasised the importance of learning the local language to facilitating access to housing and integration more broadly (Ager and Strang, 2008). While knowledge of the local language remains important when accessing housing, there is a risk of failing to consider other forms of cultural capital that facilitate access to housing. To address narrow conceptualisations of what constitutes cultural capital, Yosso (2005) drew on critical race theory to broaden the concept of cultural capital by introducing the concept of community cultural wealth, which she defines as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). As part of this definition of community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) introduced the notion of navigational capital to capture the skills communities of colour employ when navigating institutions permeated by racism. Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational cultural capital is potentially a useful conceptual addition in terms of broadening understanding of the forms of cultural capital drawn on by refugees when accessing housing.

While cultural capital plays an important role in accessing housing, it has also been found to play a role in guiding housing choices. Within housing studies, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has found particular application in the study of gentrification processes (Bridge, 2006; Huang et al., 2018). For example, Bridge's (2006) study of households who recently moved within or out of a gentrified neighbourhood in the UK examined the role of cultural capital in households' decisions to move. This research found that moving decisions were shaped by house aesthetics (objectified cultural capital) as well as the proximity of good schools for the children (institutionalised cultural capital). Similarly, Huang et al.'s (2018) research on gentrifiers in Beijing found that decisions to move to a specific neighbourhood were guided by the gentrifiers' ambitions to increase their children's access to cultural capital. Access to these institutionalised forms of cultural capital has also been shown to influence the housing choices of refugees. Several studies

have highlighted that refugees frequently prioritise maintaining the continuity of their own or their children's education as a decisive factor in their choice of residence (Adam et al., 2019; Soederberg, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). For instance, in her examination of the housing provision for refugees in Berlin, Soederberg (2019) observed that when refugee families were presented with the option to transition from communal emergency shelters to modular housing on the city's outskirts, many parents expressed apprehension about disrupting their children's educational access, leading them to be hesitant about relocating. In short, ensuring access to institutionalised forms of cultural capital emerged as an important consideration when making housing decisions.

To summarise, this section has delved into how the concept of cultural capital can be effectively applied to enhance understanding of refugees' housing journeys. The notion of embodied cultural capital, encompassing forms of knowledge such as proficiency in the local language and an understanding of the housing market, have proven valuable in furthering understanding of refugees' access to housing. However, in order to avoid an overly strong emphasis on barriers such as the lack of knowledge of the local language, Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth, particularly its idea of navigational capital, was introduced to broaden the perspective on the role of cultural capital in refugees' housing search practices. Furthermore, as highlighted, cultural capital not only helps to bolster understanding of housing access but also notably influences housing decisions.

3.2.3.2. *Social Capital*

The literature on refugees' housing journeys has repeatedly drawn attention to the manifold role of social capital in impacting housing journeys and neighbourhood experiences (Adam et al., 2019; Ager and Strang, 2008; Aigner, 2019; Dahya, 1974; Flatau et al., 2015; Hanley et al., 2018; Murdie and Logan, 2011; Strang et al., 2018; Van Kempen and Özüekren, 1998; Walsh et al., 2016). This section first discusses Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital and how it has been mobilised in the analysis of housing search practices. It then considers the role of social capital when accessing supports within neighbourhoods drawing on Putnam's (1993) conceptualisation of social capital.

Several housing and migration scholars have applied Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital to examine housing pathways (Aigner, 2019; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015). Bourdieu defines social capital as

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.21).

The degree of social capital available to an actor depends on the number of social connections they can mobilise, as well as the amount of capital accessible through these connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu, therefore, emphasises the importance of the mobilisability of resources and acknowledges that not all social networks offer mobilisable resources (Anthias, 2007; Ryan et al., 2008). Ryan et al. (2008), for example, suggest differentiating between vertical and horizontal networks; horizontal networks are those that exist between people of a similar social position whereas vertical networks connect an individual in a lower position with an individual in a more advantageous position. In her examination of the housing entry pathways of refugees in Vienna, Aigner (2019) drew on Bourdieu’s concept of social capital to analyse the role of social networks in refugees’ access to housing. She found that relationships to different types of intermediaries, such as migrants, helpful locals, estate agents and social workers, led refugees to access distinct housing subfields, with each field providing differing levels of security. Additionally, the author noted that cultural and symbolic capital played a key role in facilitating access to these different forms of social capital; for example, knowing the local language was key to establishing contacts to helpful locals and estate agents, whereas having children served as a form of symbolic capital, as families were seen more deserving of support by social workers (Aigner, 2019). In short, Aigner (2019) was not only able to demonstrate that social capital was central to accessing housing but also demonstrated its interplay with cultural and symbolic capital.

Social capital is not only relevant when accessing housing but also, importantly, when accessing emotional and/or practical supports within neighbourhoods, as discussed in Chapter Two. While Bourdieu’s (1986) conceptualisation of social capital is useful in examining the role of social networks in facilitating social mobility within a specific field, such as the housing market, this concept is less well suited to examining the impact of community and neighbourhood dynamics on social networks (Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Morrow, 1999). Instead, several authors have suggested that Putnam’s conceptualisation of social capital is more useful when studying social connections within neighbourhoods (Ager and Strang, 2008; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Hebbani et al., 2018). Putnam (1993) defines social capital as the “features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993,

p.35). According to Putnam (1993), social capital encompasses both bonding social capital, which refers to connections among people with similar backgrounds or identities, and bridging social capital, which refers to connections between diverse groups or individuals (Putnam, 1993). Putnam's (1993) differentiation between social bonds and social bridges builds on Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties. While strong ties can provide emotional support and a sense of belonging, weak ties play a critical role in information diffusion, social mobility, and accessing resources outside of one's immediate social circle (Granovetter, 1973).

Building on this work, Ager and Strang (2008) defined social bonds as *within*-group relationships, which include family ties as well as relationships that are bound by ethnicity or religion; social bridges, which refer to relationships *between* different groups or communities; and social links which describe the relationship to governmental institutions and service providers (Ager and Strang, 2008). The authors stressed that gestures of friendliness, such as being greeted by neighbours, played a key role in refugees feeling a sense of safety and home. Similarly, in their qualitative research into the neighbourhood experiences of refugees in Brisbane, Australia, Hebbani et al. (2018) found that refugees emphasised the significance of cross-cultural connections to neighbours, a form of bridging capital, to feeling welcomed. However, the authors also noted that a strong emphasis on privacy by locals, as well as language and cultural barriers impeded the ability to build these connections with neighbours, thereby impacting refugees' sense of belonging (Hebbani et al., 2018). In short, neighbourhoods that offered access to bridging capital played an important role in instilling a sense of home, safety and belonging.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Putnam (1993) suggests that societies with high levels of social capital tend to have several positive outcomes, including increased social cohesion, trust, and cooperation among community members (Putnam, 1993). Because Putnam views social capital as a public good that requires communities to have strong and trusting relationships, migration and ethnic diversity are often seen as detrimental to social cohesion and the building of social capital (Putnam, 2007). Yet, several researchers have questioned to what extent the emphasis placed on local communities in generating social capital remains appropriate, considering the extent of connectedness across local and national boundaries (Hebbani et al., 2018; Ryan, 2011). In their seminal research exploring the strategies and skills used by Polish migrants when forming new social networks in the UK, Ryan et al. (2008) caution "that the focus on social capital within communities and

local neighbourhoods fails to capture the dynamism, diversity and spatial dispersion of migrants' social networks" (Ryan et al., 2008, p.686). The authors note that Putnam's (1993) emphasis on the continuity, stability and local embeddedness of social networks neglects the fluid, geographically dispersed and temporary character of many networks (Ryan et al., 2008).

In summary, this section has examined how the concept of social capital can be conceptualised and applied in two distinct ways. First, social capital in the Bourdieusian sense (1986) can be mobilised to analyse refugees' access to housing, and can even shed light on how different forms of social capital provide access to separate housing subfields. Second, social capital according to Putnam (1993) can be understood as a neighbourhood characteristic, consisting of social bonds and social bridges, that can provide access to supports and foster a sense of home.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion of the theoretical approaches that have been mobilised to date to examine refugees' housing journeys. A core argument presented is that an explanatory framework is needed that can further an integrated understanding of refugees' housing journeys. Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*, with its concepts of field, habitus and practice, offers an integrated framework to study the transition from DP to housing as a transition between two distinct fields of housing, with each field fundamentally shaping refugees' practices and habitus. Furthermore, the application of Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (1977) allows us to see this junction in refugees' housing journeys not only as transition between two fields but also, importantly, as a shift in symbolic capital. The notion of symbolic capital and how it is shaped by the bureaucratic field is crucial to understanding legal status, not only in terms of access to rights and entitlements, but also as a signifier of symbolic value that is attached to groups and thereby impacts on their social position. Lastly, Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of cultural and social capital can be mobilised to account for the resources used by refugees when searching for housing. These two concepts are usefully extended by Yosso's (2005) concept of navigational capital, which broadens understanding of cultural capital, and Putnam's (2007) concept of social capital, which draws attention to the social capital inherent to communities.

4. Methodology

Having outlined the policy context of this study and reviewed the international research literature and theoretical concepts that form the backdrop of this research, this chapter describes the methodological and epistemological foundations of the research. Methodology informs the epistemological perspective as well as the research design (Creswell, 2007). The chapter presents the rationale for the study's methodological approach and sets out how this approach guided the research design, ethical considerations, data collection methods and analysis procedures deployed.

As outlined briefly in the Introduction (Chapter 1), this research aimed to examine refugees' housing journeys in Ireland; more specifically, their experiences of transitioning from Direct Provision (DP) to independent housing; their housing experiences, including the role of housing and neighbourhood in the broader settlement process; and their experiences of housing precariousness and/or homelessness. The study's core research questions were as follows:

- How do refugees experience the transition from DP into housing?
- What strategies do refugees employ when searching for housing and/or when seeking to improve their housing situations?
- What are refugees' experiences of formal support services as they transition out of DP centres?
- What informal networks do they draw on while searching for housing?
- What role do place and neighbourhood play in refugees' housing experiences?

The overarching research aim was to gain a detailed understanding of refugees' housing journeys and how they are shaped by their individual situations as well as contextual factors such as asylum and housing policy context. The research applied a case study approach that privileged refugees' lived experiences and perspectives, while simultaneously accounting for the economic, political and social contexts shaping these experiences. By employing method triangulation, which involved combining in-depth interviewing with the ethnographic 'Go-Along' approach, the study aimed to generate a multifaceted understanding of the case under investigation.

This chapter begins by outlining the methodological and epistemological foundation of the study, presents the methods applied, and outlines the ethical considerations that informed the design and conduct of the research. This is followed by

a detailed account of the fieldwork phase of the study, paying particular attention to participant recruitment, the data collection process and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research. The chapter concludes by setting out the study's approach to data analysis.

4.1. The Research Design

4.1.1. A Social Constructivist Perspective

This research is underpinned by a social constructivist perspective, which assumes that knowledge is constructed through experience and learning (Stake, 1995). Within a constructivist epistemology, knowledge is understood to be neither completely subjective or objective but, rather, “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p.42). In other words, a constructivist view acknowledges that knowledge arises from a person's interactions with other people as well as the material world they inhabit.

The emergence of the research field known as *Sociology of Knowledge* during the early 20th century in European cities such as Vienna, Paris, and Cologne laid the foundation for social constructivism (Pfadenhauer, 2018). It was within this context that Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann published their influential work titled *The Social Construction of Reality* in 1966 (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). By arguing that reality is constantly constructed through social interactions, this work marked a significant milestone in the development of social constructivism as we know it today (Pfadenhauer, 2018). Similarly to Bourdieu (1977), Berger and Luckman were driven by an ambition to overcome the schism between objectivist and subjectivist theoretical perspectives when developing the theory of social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Bongaerts, 2018; Dreher, 2018; Knoblauch, 2003).

The current research employs the lens of social constructivism (Stake, 1995), thereby privileging the lived experiences of participants without disavowing the impact of the objective structures they encounter. In adopting a constructivist view, this research is particularly interested in how refugees construct meaning and knowledge from the experience of transitioning from Direct Provision to independent housing, while taking into account that these meanings are not created in isolation but rather through social interactions within a specific social, historical and cultural context (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995).

4.1.2. *A Case Study Approach*

Since local and national contexts have been found to be influential in shaping refugees' housing experiences (Bakker et al., 2016; Kissoon, 2010; Phillips, 2006), a multiple case study approach was deemed especially suited to investigating the diverse social, economic, and cultural contexts in which the housing journeys of refugees unfold. In contrast to other research methodologies, the case study approach emphasises that a case needs to be considered within its particular context (Creswell, 2007), thereby opening up a space within which to connect the individually experienced 'private troubles' with the 'public issues' of our time (Mills, 1959). According to Creswell (2007), a case study approach is particularly suited to the in-depth investigation of complex processes within their particular context; in the case of the current study, the processes associated with refugees' transitions from DP to housing, including their search for housing and their attempts to establish a sense of home. A case study approach requires the researcher to clearly define the boundaries of the case under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Hyett et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). This study's case is bound by focusing on a specific process within a defined geographical context: the research examines the process of refugees' transition from DP to housing in Ireland while paying attention to how different local contexts impact their transition experiences.

The case study approach employs 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) and vignettes (Stake, 1995) to produce a credible account of the complexity of the phenomena under investigation (Tracy, 2010). Thick descriptions aim to "provoke vicarious experience and a sense of being there with the researcher in their interaction with the case" (Hyett et al., 2014, p.7). However, these detailed descriptions of the everyday lives of marginalised groups can also bear the risk of focusing excessively on socially deviant practices, thereby neglecting the social and political contexts that shape these observed practices (Crossley, 2017; Farrugia and Gerrard, 2016). To avoid this potential weakness, this research applied Loic Wacquant's concept of 'thick construction' (Wacquant 2013 cited in Crossley, 2017), which "offers up the opportunity of focusing attention more on the deeper social and political structures that shape life in local spaces" (Crossley, 2017, p. 57). In other words, applying 'thick construction' means to recognise and make visible that social practice is always situated within a particular social, historical and cultural context.

Qualitative methods such as the case study approach are sometimes criticised for not permitting the generalisation of its findings due to its small sample size (Creswell, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006). While qualitative research does not allow statistical inferences to

be drawn, it nonetheless allows researchers to make propositional generalisations by developing theoretical assertions (Stake, 1995). To support the development of theoretical assertions, this study adopted the process of ‘progressive focusing’, which involves the repeated examination of observations made in order to turn them into assertions (Stake, 1995). The approach of ‘progressive focusing’ is theory-developing and abductive in nature (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012) and can therefore be located between the theory-generating, inductive approach of the classic Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992) and the theory-testing deductive approach of case study researchers such as Yin (2014).

Finally, a case study approach requires the research to be responsive to emerging assertions and research puzzles (Stake, 1995). In other words, new or unexpected issues or themes that arise early during the data collection phase need to inform the conduct of subsequent interviews (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012, p. 823). The ability to retain flexibility and responsiveness throughout the data collection process is a major strength of the qualitative case study approach (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). To conclude, the case study approach and its tools of thick construction and progressive focusing offer a flexible and adaptive methodological approach for the conduct of a detailed analysis of refugees’ transition from DP to housing in Ireland.

4.2. Combining Qualitative Methods

A case study approach allows the researcher to combine different methods of data collection to conduct an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007; Hyett et al., 2014; Stake, 1995). As Tracy (2010) asserts, the combination of different data types, theoretical perspectives and methods can “allow different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re) interpretation” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843), which in turn bolsters the credibility of qualitative research. Hence, this research used a combination of qualitative methods – also referred to as method triangulation – to yield a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation (Flick, 2018). The in-depth interview, which aimed to explore and understand participants’ housing journeys, was combined with what is referred to as a ‘Go-Along’ approach. The ‘Go-Along’ is an ethnographic, person-centred approach that involves the researcher and the research participant walking together to places that are meaningful to them while the participant shares any observations, descriptions, experiences, thoughts or memories evoked by the walk (Flick et al., 2018).

This combination of data collection methods aimed to generate a ‘systematic triangulation of perspectives’ (Flick, 2018, p.787) which was achieved by combining in-depth interviewing with the ‘Go-Along’ approach, where each method represents a distinct research perspective (Flick, 2018): the qualitative in-depth interview can access the subjective meaning-making perspectives of participants while the ethnographic ‘Go-Along’ allows the study of social practice, place and milieu (Emmel and Clark, 2009; Flick et al., 2018). This combination of methods therefore permits the triangulation of perspectives to produce a broader and more in-depth understanding of the research topic.

4.2.1. *The In-Depth Interview*

The study’s core method of data collection was the in-depth interview, which enables the exploration of participants’ views, interpretations and experiences through dialogue between participant and researcher (Chase, 2018; Flick, 2000; Mason, 2018; Mueller, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2008). The design and focus of the in-depth interview were guided, initially, by the research questions and the learning arising from the literature review and, following the initiation of the interviewing process, by the topics and themes raised by the interview participants themselves (Mason, 2018; Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012; Stake, 1995). In other words, qualitative interviewing was responsive to unexpected themes arising during the course of the research as well as to the specific dynamics of each interview situation (Mason, 2018).

The in-depth interviewing approach used in this research integrated aspects of the ‘episodic interview’ (Flick, 2000), as well as elements of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2018). The ‘episodic interview’ (Flick, 2000; Mueller, 2019) was chosen due to its interest in specific situations; in this case, the transition from Direct Provision to housing. According to Flick (2000, p. 77), “episodic knowledge comprises knowledge that is linked to concrete circumstances (time, space, people, events, situations)”, meaning that the ‘episodic interview’ asks about participants’ experiences in relation to particular situations that are relevant to the study’s research questions. Applied to the current research, episodes such as ‘gaining status’ and ‘moving out of DP’ were directly addressed during the interview. The ‘episodic interview’ was extended by introducing elements of narrative inquiry (Chase, 2018; Mueller, 2019), which involved asking research participants to narrate their lived experiences since their arrival in Ireland. This combination of narrative interview and episodic interviewing is also known as the *problem-centred interview* (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

Flick (2018) notes that method triangulation, as detailed in the previous section, is not limited to the combination of different methods, but can also include ‘within-method triangulation’. This particular form of triangulation refers to the use of different types of interview questions, each one inspired by a specific methodology such as narrative inquiry, phenomenology or grounded theory (Flick, 2018). This ‘within-method triangulation’ thereby supports the study of a case from different perspectives (Flick, 2018). For example, to gain a full understanding of participants’ housing experiences, this research included interview questions that correspond closely with a phenomenological tradition by seeking “concrete descriptions rather than abstract reflections or theorizations” (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 1003, p. 1003). So, instead of asking the interviewees about their thoughts on *why* they experience the world in a certain way, the interviewer also focused on *how* the actual events in their lives unfolded and *how* these were experienced (Brinkmann, 2018). In addition, inspired by Clapham’s (2005) constructionist housing pathway approach, the in-depth interview included questions aimed at documenting participants’ housing journeys in Ireland, with a particular focus on how participants made sense of their experiences of moving from DP to housing. Since these different methods stem from separate and distinct theoretical traditions and perspectives, they generate different types of data, yielding a broader and more nuanced understanding of the case under study (Flick, 2018).

The research design initially intended for all interviews to be conducted in person, resulting in 11 face-to-face interviews taking place between October 2019 and March 2021. The interview setting and its location play an important “role in constructing reality, serving simultaneously as both cultural product and producer” (Herzog, 2012, p.207) and also offer opportunities to engage in participant observation (Elwood and Martin, 2000). The consequences of moving from face-to-face to online interviewing, following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore required careful consideration. Studies have shown that refugees are competent users of online communication tools because they frequently use these tools to maintain contact with family members and friends living in other countries (Andrade Diaz and Doolin, 2016). Furthermore, during the pandemic, most supports, including housing and language supports moved online, providing people with learning opportunities that were potentially enabling in terms of supporting the acquisition of digital literacy skills required to participate in online interviews.

When conducting online interviews, it is important to consider the impact of the digital environment on the interview situation. Inevitably, some non-verbal communication will be lost during a video call, which can potentially pose a barrier to

creating a connection between the researcher and the participant (Lo Lacono et al., 2016). Nonetheless, despite being characterised by far more limited non-verbal communication, research has demonstrated that it is possible to build a rapport with research participants when conducting online interviews in a similar way as a researcher would in the context of face-to-face interviews (N. Brown, 2018). Indeed, one study found that participants appeared to be more at ease during online interviews (Janghorban et al., 2014). The shift from face-to-face to online interviewing therefore offered a viable option to continue in-depth interviewing during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in an additional ten interviews conducted online.

4.2.2. The Go-Along Approach

Since method triangulation, as discussed above, yields a deeper understanding of the topic under investigation (Flick, 2018), the in-depth interview was combined with the 'Go-Along' interview. A 'Go-Along' approach is a form of ethnographic engagement that involves the researcher and the research participant walking alongside each other and discussing the places they encounter (Evans and Jones, 2011; Hall, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003). In a recent study on immigrants' sense of belonging in Berlin, the combination of in-depth interviewing and 'Go-Along' methodology proved particularly valuable in uncovering novel insights into the participants' realities and lived experiences (Flick et al., 2018). Since, in this current study, participants were encouraged to show the researcher places that held meaning for their lives, past or present, the use of the 'Go-Along' in this research also had elements of a biographical walking interview (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019), which "opens up a space for dialogue where embodied knowledge, experience, and memories can be shared" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.4).

The use of 'Go-Alongs' was motivated by four main factors: first, as a way to address the inevitable power imbalances between the researcher and research participant in the conduct of qualitative research; second, to introduce a spatial component, which is particularly valuable when seeking to account for the 'spatial turn' in social sciences (Brinkmann, 2018) and thus particularly relevant to housing research; third, to enable "other ways of observing, knowing, and appreciating the lived experience of another" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.77); and finally, as a method of data collection that facilitates dialogue when cultural and language barriers may hinder a fluent conversation (O'Neill and Hubbard, 2010).

As discussed earlier, a constructivist view assumes that knowledge does not only arise from a person's interactions with other people but also from their interactions with the material world (Crotty, 1998). Meeting places for interviews are often chosen because they are quiet and offer privacy and these locations may hold very little meaning to participants' everyday lives and can create a rather formal atmosphere (Elwood and Martin, 2000). 'Go-Alongs', on the other hand, provide the opportunity to literally walk into the world of the participant alongside that individual. This creates opportunities to engage more deeply with participants' material worlds by offering the possibility of using what De Leon and Cohen (2005) term 'walking probes', which "involve visiting a location that has meaning to an informant and discussing the place and the built environment that the informant associates with the locale" (De Leon and Cohen, 2005, p. 203).

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the conduct of this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin in July 2019. Individuals who have experienced forced migration are recognised to be a vulnerable group because of their prior and possibly ongoing experiences of trauma¹⁹ and displacement (Ellis, 2007; Catriona Mackenzie et al., 2007). Consequently, particular attention had to be paid to protecting the study's participants from any emotional harm that they could potentially experience by participating in this research. To ensure participants' safety, voluntary participation, confidentiality (including the limits of confidentiality) and dignity and respect were the guiding principles of this research project. The following paragraphs present my reflections on procedural, situational, relational and exiting ethics, as proposed by Tracy (2010).

The application submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, which is a feature of the procedural ethics underpinning this research, provided a detailed account of the ethical procedures that would be put in place during the conduct of the research and was subsequently approved. Since qualitative methods commonly generate non-anonymised interview data and audio files, as well as field notes, a full account of how data such as interview

¹⁹ This trauma is typically compounded by the uncertainty of the asylum process, extended periods of family separation, as well as the living conditions that people endure while waiting for a decision on their asylum application (Porter and Haslam, 2005). Once people gain status, the search for housing in a tight private rental market, and the threat of experiencing homelessness and housing precarity, add additional pressures (Ziersch and Due, 2018).

transcripts and field notes would be anonymised was provided. Any information that could potentially lead to the identification of a research participant was subsequently removed, including names of individuals, dates of birth, the geographical location of the DP centres where participants had previously lived and the geographical locations where participants resided at the time of interview. In addition, a unique code and a pseudonym were assigned to each research participant, which was also used during the data analysis process and when writing up the research findings. All audio files are currently stored on an external password-protected hard drive and will be destroyed after this thesis has been examined. All anonymised interview transcripts and field notes are stored safely on a password-protected computer and will be retained for no more than five years after the dissertation is examined. An information sheet (Appendix A), containing key information on the research project, explained these data management processes to participants in an accessible manner.

Relational ethics refers to the researcher recognising and valuing “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched” (Ellis, 2007, p.4). The researcher ensured that, at no point, did a potential research participant feel pressure to participate in the research and it was also emphasised that participation or non-participation would not lead to any negative (or, indeed, positive) consequences for the participant. Only when the researcher was confident that a potential research participant understood all of the information provided and freely agreed to participate was the individual asked to sign the consent form²⁰ (Appendix B). Specific steps were taken to ensure that research participants were treated in a respectful and ethical manner. For example, during the design phase of the research, it was decided not to ask participants about the circumstances that led to their seeking asylum in Ireland, knowing that reasons for a person leaving their home country and the journey to Ireland itself almost inevitably involves a multitude of traumatic experiences that would add little to the research compared to the pain of recounting such events.

Another important relational ethics consideration guiding this research was to be as participatory as possible, while simultaneously taking into account the time and resource constraints of the study’s participants. This was achieved by inviting participants

²⁰ In the case of face-to-face interviews, participants were asked to sign the consent form immediately before the interview took place. On the other hand, for online interviews, participants were required to send a scanned copy of the signed consent form via email prior to the scheduled interview.

to a Go-Along which provided an optional and flexible participatory data collection method where participants themselves decided how much time they would like to invest in the research project. Another important aspect was to strive to achieve some form of reciprocity. This was done by offering small tokens of gratitude in exchange for the knowledge, experience and perspectives shared with me by participants. Such tokens of gratitude varied and included the provision of information or signposting to a relevant service and also giving participants a 20 euro gift voucher after the interview was completed. A number of participants expressed an interest in studying social policy and/or pursuing a PhD and I made sure to take the time to share my experience of postgraduate study with them.

Following the principle of situational ethics, which is based on the understanding that “each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions” (Tracy, 2010, p.847), efforts were made to give space to participants to share what they had to say. Even if participants veered off-topic at times and talked about issues that were not necessarily directly relevant to the research, listening actively and providing a space where people could reflect on their experience was prioritised at all times. While researchers are often hoping to hear coherent accounts, research participants, particularly if they have suffered trauma, might not be able to deliver a coherent narration (Chase, 2018). While some researchers argue that it is important to challenge research participants’ accounts during an interview, I felt this would raise significant ethical issues (Scheibelhofer, 2008) since participants were likely to have already experienced considerable scrutiny of their life stories during the asylum process (Conlan et al., 2012).

Exiting ethics is concerned with anticipating the ways in which the output of the research, which includes a dissertation and other forms of dissemination such as conference presentations and research papers, could potentially be misconstrued and/or used to further stigmatise the researched group (Tracy, 2010). The study’s case study methodological approach is arguably particularly valuable in mitigating such risk since it pays particular attention to the political and social context in which social practice is situated (Stake, 1995). In the end, doing research ethically requires the researcher to continuously consider the ethics of those decisions and interactions that are part of the research process and also emergent (Darling, 2014). The writing of detailed field notes immediately after the conclusion of interviews and ‘Go-Alongs’ proved particularly helpful

here in supporting reflection on any ethical dilemmas that arose during this research project and in coming up with strategies to address these going forward (Tracy, 2010).

4.4. Fieldwork

Having outlined the methodological and ethical considerations that underpinned the design of this study, the following section provides a detailed account of the data collection process, which took place over a two-year period between October 2019 and October 2021.

4.4.1. Entering the Field

To familiarise myself with the local context and with the aim of building rapport and informing gatekeepers about the research project, I started to attend events and conferences on the topics of Direct Provision, housing and homelessness after registering as a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin in September 2018. Alongside the conduct of desk research, I was able to identify organisations and individuals who work in several relevant fields who could potentially assist me in gaining access to my research population. The use of Twitter proved to be a particularly useful tool in staying current with ongoing events, activities, and work of various organisations, volunteers, academics, and refugee activists involved in the fields of migration, housing, and homelessness. I used these early months to create an online presence in the hope that this might provide an avenue through which to advertise the research project once the data collection phase was initiated.

When planning the research I anticipated that it might be easier to recruit people who were still living in DP or were accessing homelessness emergency accommodation as they would be more likely to be in contact with services. To facilitate the recruitment of participants who were no longer living in DP and who did not engage with housing services, I took up a volunteering role with an English language school based in Dublin in April 2019. This proved useful in terms of expanding my network and had the positive side effect of enabling me to hone my communication skills with people with different levels of English language proficiency, which was very beneficial during the interviewing phase of this research.

4.4.2. *Sampling and Recruitment*

Initially, the research aimed to recruit refugees who had been granted status²¹ during the two years prior to participating in the research project. However, as the recruitment process progressed, the sampling criteria were expanded to include individuals who had gained status within a timeframe of up to ten years before their involvement in the study. The expansion of the sample criteria allowed to study refugees' housing experiences at different stages of their housing journeys after gaining status. The sampling strategy aimed to achieve diversity in terms of participants' experiences of living in DP, their subsequent housing journeys, their age, gender, family composition and country of origin. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to be over the age of 18 years and have a sufficient level of English to understand the research and what participation involved²². Both women and men were included as participants. Individuals were recruited with the broad aim of capturing different stages of the housing transition process, including participants who were actively searching for housing and either living in the DP system or accessing homelessness services, as well as participants who had transitioned into independent housing.

A purposive sampling technique was applied with the aim of increasing the diversity of perspectives on the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007). Initially, the research aimed to recruit 30-35 participants but this sampling target was revised and adjusted as the research progressed and as saturation was reached, resulting in a diverse sample of 22 participants²³ (Mason, 2018, p. 74). The concept of theoretical saturation, frequently utilised in grounded theory, indicates the point at which sufficient data have been gathered to support the assertions developed throughout the research process (Bowen, 2008). In order to establish that saturation was reached, ongoing examination and comparison of individual case studies, as well as the inclusion of potential negative cases that might challenge emerging patterns in the data, was essential (Bowen, 2008).

Data collection was initiated in the Dublin region, which is an important research site because it offers employment opportunities and access to existing migrant

²¹ International protection, subsidiary protection or leave to remain.

²² The use of interpreters was considered in order to allow the inclusion of more diverse perspectives. Two of the participants had support from informal interpreters during the interview – a friend and a family member respectively. Financial constraints did not allow for the use of formal interpretation services.

²³ See section 5.1 of this thesis for more detail on the demographic profile of the study's sample.

communities, making it an attractive place for settlement (Fahey et al., 2019). The recruitment strategy also aimed to enlist research participants from two additional research sites. These two medium-sized towns were selected because of their differing geographical distance to Dublin and because they were both sites of DP centres. The plan, at this early stage of embarking on the data collection process, was to spend a number of weeks in each location, with the aim of building rapport with local gatekeepers, which would in turn facilitate recruitment. However, this strategy had to be adapted following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions, which did not permit non-essential travel for extended periods between March 2020 and the summer of 2021. As a result, the geographical criteria was widened to include participants across Ireland, which led to a final sample of 22 participants, with 14 participants living in Dublin and with eight living in towns and villages in seven different counties nationally.

At the outset of the data collection process, the intention was to recruit participants primarily with the help of gatekeepers (e.g. service providers and community organisations working in the fields of housing and refugee integration), which is a common approach to the conduct of research on the experiences of refugees and other 'hard to reach' groups (Kissoon, 2010). It was recognised that reliance on gatekeepers can pose challenges, particularly if the interests and expectations of gatekeepers diverge from those of the researcher (Obijiofor et al., 2018). Gatekeepers can also influence who gets selected and recruited for participation, which can create its own set of issues and potential biases (Øye et al., 2016).

Twenty-two gatekeepers were contacted at the outset of the data collection process and asked whether they would consider assisting the research project by supporting participant recruitment. An information sheet, which provided far more detail on the project and the research process was attached via email (see Appendix C). Despite several organisations articulating their interest in supporting the research, these contacts seldom translated into the actual recruitment of research participants. In the end, six of the study's participants were referred through four NGOs, five of whom were referred by organisations that worked with refugees and one participant by an organisation working in the housing/homelessness sector²⁴.

²⁴ One potential reason for the low level of referral from the housing sector is that the housing support services contacted were usually larger organisations with a larger number of managerial levels so, even if the research had support from higher levels in this hierarchy, this endorsement may not have reached frontline workers or they might not have had the time to invest in assisting with recruitment.

Another barrier to participant recruitment was that DP centres in Ireland are not easily accessible to researchers. Despite several attempts, I was not granted permission to access DP centres to conduct interviews²⁵. Later, following multiple recruitment setbacks, volunteers who provided practical supports to people living in DP and usually had a wide network of contacts that included refugees who had gained status, became critical to carving out access routes. I was able to establish contact with volunteers through my volunteering at a language school, through online contacts via Twitter, as well as by regularly attending meetings of a volunteer group that worked directly with refugees in the Dublin region. Through these three channels, a total of 11 participants were recruited with the help of six volunteers. In addition, four participants were recruited through my making direct contact with them; three whom I met through in-person and online events organised by refugee advocacy groups and NGOs, and one through Twitter. While I tried to use snowball sampling during the early stages of the recruitment process (Noy, 2008), I realised that there is a risk of recruiting people with similar backgrounds by using this strategy and, in the end, only one participant was recruited through snowballing.

While the research aimed to apply a purposive sampling technique with the aim of increasing the diversity of perspectives on the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007) and of reaching theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008), in practice, recruitment was also guided by who agreed to participate. While this bears the risk of recruiting participants with similar experiences, the wide variety of recruitment channels used helped to ensure that sample diversity was achieved and that the participants recruited were able to provide a multi-faceted picture of the transition from DP to housing in Ireland.

4.5. Data Collection

4.5.1. *Interruption of the Research Process due to Covid-19*

The initial research timeline aimed to achieve the milestone of completing the study's data collection over a 12-month period during year two of the PhD. In line with this plan, the first interview took place in October 2019. However, after completing 11 in-person interviews and six Go-Alongs between October 2019 and March 2020, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought an abrupt halt to in-person data collection. The Irish

²⁵ At the outset of the data collection process, I contacted the Department of Justice to request permission to conduct interviews within the centres and was asked to submit a research proposal outlining the aims of the research, which I promptly completed and submitted. However, despite sending various follow-up e-mails, I never received a reply.

government introduced Covid restrictions in March 17 2020 which, among other measures, restricted people's movements to a two-kilometre radius from their homes. During these early weeks, there was still some hope that in-person data collection might resume during the summer months. However, when it became clear that the resumption of fieldwork involving face-to-face contact with participants was highly unlikely, an amended research ethics application was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee, School of Social Work and Social Policy, TCD and permission to conduct online interviews was obtained. Recruitment for this phase of the study recommenced in August 2020. Unsurprisingly, the context of participant recruitment had altered dramatically at this juncture. In-person events, which had previously offered a good opportunity to meet potential participants and connect with gatekeepers, did not resume, making it far more difficult to engage in networking, establish connections and introduce myself and the research project. During this time, organisations providing supports to refugees were under significant pressure and frequently struggled to maintain the delivery of their services and supports. As a result, some of the contacts that had been made before the pandemic could not be re-established. For example, one organisation had supported the scheduling of four interviews for April 2020, all of which were cancelled following the announcement of Ireland's first Level 5 lockdown in March 2020. At the point of resuming data collection through online interviewing in September 2020, it was not possible to re-establish contact with this gatekeeper in order to conduct the planned interviews.

Despite these difficulties, new participants were recruited, half of whom lived in Dublin and the other half in counties across Ireland. Eleven interviews (ten online and one in-person interview) were subsequently conducted between October 2020 and October 2021. It was hoped that the 'Go-Alongs' could also be resumed at this juncture. However, during the first 'Go-Along' organised since the pandemic, in October 2020, it became clear that social distancing was difficult to maintain while walking side by side, especially in an urban context where there was limited space. It was therefore decided to delay the resumption of the 'Go-Alongs' until Covid-related restrictions were lifted and the Covid-19 vaccine had been offered to a majority of adults. 'Go-Alongs' therefore only resumed in July 2021 and three 'Go-Alongs' were conducted between July and August 2021.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, an emergent body of literature has begun to address the various ethical challenges that can arise when conducting qualitative research online during a crisis (Keen et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021).

The following sections reflect on the use of in-person and online interviewing, as well as ‘Go-Alongs’ during the course of this research.

4.5.2. *The Interviewing Process*

In-person interviews started in October 2019. Once contact with a potential participant was established, the researcher explained the study in detail to the interested person and encouraged them to take sufficient time to consider whether they would like to participate. If a person agreed to participate, a date, time and interview location were then agreed. Interviews frequently took place during evenings and weekends in order to accommodate participant availability since many were participating in full-time employment and/or education. In-person interviews took place in a range of settings, including cafés (n=5), a meeting room located in research offices at the university (n=3), the participant’s home (n=3) and a community centre (n=1). While an office setting was the preferred option among younger participants, cafés and home visits were favoured by participants aged 35 years and older. Cafés as interview locations run the risk of not offering a great deal of privacy but participants who chose to meet in these settings seemed comfortable to talk openly during the interview²⁶. Giving participants the choice of meeting in a location where they felt most at ease proved particularly important for this research and its importance has also been highlighted in other studies (Darling, 2014; Elwood and Martin, 2000).

All interviews were recorded with the participants’ agreement, with the exception of the first interview when the participant did not consent to be recorded, which is not uncommon when interviewing refugees (Netto, 2011a). In this case, extensive notes were taken during and after the interview. On average, the interviews were 90 minutes in duration, yielding a total of 32 hours of audio recordings, which were subsequently transcribed. While conducting interviews in a multilingual setting can pose challenges, not being a native English speaker myself, in combination with having taught English as a volunteer, and having worked in multilingual work environments, helped me to communicate well with people who had various accents and levels of English.

The in-depth interview was guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix D) that supported the researcher in keeping the interview focused on the topics that were relevant

²⁶ Cafés also featured in a number of ‘Go-Alongs’ as they served as valuable spaces where participants could socialise with friends and pursue their work or studies, especially during their time in DP when privacy was limited.

to the aims of this research project. The initial interviews opened with the question: *'Can you tell me a bit about your life at the moment – the area where you live in, a bit about daily life, things like that?'*. This open-ended question aimed to elicit details about the participant's current situation and also offered them the space to provide information on what they felt was relevant or most important. Following this opening question, a timeline was drawn up by the researcher in conversation with the participant documenting the various places where the participant has lived since their arrival in Ireland, places in the DP system and places they had lived at after gaining status, such as homelessness emergency accommodation and private rental accommodation. This was followed by questions about each place, how they came to live there and how they experienced living there. Episodes of particular interest included gaining status and the subsequent search for housing. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences through probing questions such as *'What was that like?'*. The interview concluded with some reflective questions on the meaning of home and how participants viewed their future.

While the interview schedule was reflected upon after the conduct of all early interviews and adapted as deemed necessary, the disruption of data collection during the initial six months of the Covid-19 pandemic provided time to finalise all of the transcriptions, to progress data analysis, and to prepare detailed case summaries, which in turn offered the opportunity for more in-depth reflection. During this period of taking stock, the researcher realised that the current interview schedule was not sufficiently open and flexible to capture the diversity, complexity and uniqueness of each participant's life and that there was a consequent risk of missing out on important insights. To mitigate this risk the opening question was adapted to *'Could you tell me in your own words about your life since you have arrived in Ireland and the places you have lived at? You can take as much time as you want'*. This change had the benefit of providing participants with the opportunity to talk freely about topics and events that they felt were particularly important in their lives since their arrival in Ireland. After this uninterrupted narration, the researcher then asked probing questions related to each stage of the participant's journey such as their arrival in Ireland, life in DP, the experience of gaining status, the search for housing, and their housing experiences after gaining status. Allowing participants to tell their stories in this way meant that many questions were already answered in this initial narration and that questions that were not yet answered could be more seamlessly integrated into the subsequent conversation. This had a positive impact

on the flow of the interview and ensured that questions remained relevant to the participant's life story throughout the interview.

Interviewing requires a high degree of multi-tasking and skills such as “listening, observing, questioning and perseverance” (Darling, 2014, p.210). During the interview, a balance had to be struck between flexibly adapting questions to each individual narration, while at the same time ensuring that a focus on the research questions is maintained (Mason, 2018). Active listening during the interview, as well as reflection on the interview process after each interview, were central to improving the interviewing technique. These skills were developed and strengthened over the course of this research project through practice and continued self-reflection. Two examples of such reflections, one on how to deal with interviewees ‘with an agenda’, and a second reflection on how I dealt with my emotional response to interviews can be found in Appendices E and F.

4.5.2.1. Experiences with Online Interviewing

Between October 2020 and October 2021, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted online using the Microsoft Teams platform²⁷. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic and related lockdowns meant that many people were largely restricted to their homes, with limited interactions and activities, which may have led some interviewees to more easily or readily agree to participate in the research owing to having more time or perhaps feeling that the experience would provide an opportunity for social interaction. Online interviewing during the pandemic meant that home was the interview setting for both the researcher and research participants. Participants joined interview calls from their living rooms or bedrooms, while the researcher conducted the interviews at her desk in a bedroom, representing a blend of work and private sphere that was common during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Notably, some aspects of the interview did not alter following the shift from in-person to online interviewing. For example, there was no discernible impact on the duration of the interview or, importantly, on the depth and breadth of the data gathered. Also, interview disruptions caused by family members living in the same household,

²⁷ Trinity College Dublin IT Services provided access to Microsoft Teams and advised the use this platform for data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic as it was deemed the safest platform in terms of data protection. Unfortunately, Microsoft Teams only offers the option to record video and audio simultaneously. Thus, in order to avoid recording video in the interest of protecting participant confidentiality and anonymity, these interviews were recorded using the same audio-recording device as used during the conduct of in-person interviews.

particularly children, occurred in a similar way during online as during in-person interviews, providing short glimpses into everyday family interactions.

There were, however, some critical differences between the two modes of interviewing. For instance, initiating a conversation on a video call often carries a sense of urgency, making it more difficult to establish a gradual and organic rapport with the interviewee. Small talk, which helped rapport-building during in-person interviews, was far more limited during the online interviews. Likewise, while I tried to conclude online interviews with some small talk, the in-person interviews tended to end far more naturally with informal chit-chat and also provided a more natural space for researcher-participant interactions. While time was saved by not having to travel to and from an interview, I also came to understand that this travel time was important in terms of providing the space for me to mentally prepare myself for an interview and, post-interview, to process what I had heard. Conducting online interviews from home required far more conscious efforts to actively plan for this time.

As highlighted by Lo Lacono et al. (2016), video calls conceal body language and feelings, making it more difficult to respond adequately in instances where an interviewee becomes emotional. During the conduct of one online interview, the participant started to cry and I found that the online setting made it far more difficult to react in a caring manner. While I was careful to give time and space to the participant, simultaneously offering expressions of comfort, I felt that the online setting did not facilitate a sufficiently empathetic environment and also made it more challenging to gauge the participant's ability to continue with the interview. Technical disruptions related to slow or poor internet connection also presented challenges. At times, this had a negative impact on the flow of the interview and was especially difficult when a participant was recounting a difficult and emotional episode of their life. In conclusion, while online interviewing offered a useful alternative to face-to-face interviewing during the Covid-19 pandemic, the reflections outlined in this section suggest that online interactions fell somewhat short of fully replacing face-to-face interaction and communication.

4.5.2.2. Researcher Positionality

In adopting a constructivist case study methodology it is essential that the researcher acknowledges their role as an active participant in the production of knowledge (Harrison et al., 2017; Hyett et al., 2014). Building on Bourdieu's concept of epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2003), Ruokonen-Engler and Siouti (2013) developed the tool of 'biographical

reflexivity', which consists of a set of questions that aim to shed light on the researcher's biographical knowledge and how her social position influences interactions during the data collection process. The field notes written after the conduct of each interview and 'Go-Along' were here particularly helpful in facilitating continued reflection on the researcher's positionality. A key question that arose during the course of the research was whether the researcher's migration experience²⁸ would support rapport building with research participants, as observed by Hoellerer (2017) in her research with Bhutanese refugees in the UK. Upon reflection, I came to the conclusion that not being Irish may have led some participants to feel more comfortable speaking openly, and at times critically, about how they relate to Ireland and Irish society. Yet, it was evident that my migration experience was fundamentally different, constituting a particularly privileged form of migration, which limited the possibility of drawing on this experience as a way to connect.

Applying the tool of 'biographical reflexivity' (Ruokonen-Engler and Siouti, 2013) allowed me to reflect on how not only my experience of migration but other parts of my social position might impact interactions in the field. A common question that came up during several interviews and 'Go-Alongs' concerned my family status. Being in a heterosexual marriage appeared to bestow me with a certain respectability with participants who had more traditional family values. Participants with children frequently asked me whether I had children of my own, and when I would say no, some subsequently voiced their hope that I would be able to conceive soon, which prompted me to explain in a small number of instances that I was voluntarily childless. As some participants seemed to have difficulties relating to this choice, I made a conscious effort to avoid mentioning this part of myself unless someone asked me very directly about it. By employing the tool of 'biographical reflexivity' (Ruokonen-Engler and Siouti, 2013), I gained insights into the aspects of myself that facilitated connections with participants and those that potentially hindered rapport-building. This approach thus allowed me to gauge how much to reveal of myself, based on the particular circumstances. Having provided reflections on the conduct of qualitative interviewing in this research, the following section turns to the use of 'Go-Alongs'.

²⁸ The researcher moved from Switzerland to Ireland in 2016 to join her spouse who had taken up employment in County Cork. This kind of mobility is generally understood to represent a privileged form of migration since national borders can be crossed freely within the EU/Schengen area and no residence permit or visa is required for Swiss citizens to live in Ireland.

4.5.3. *The 'Go-Along'*

While the qualitative interview was the core method of data collection, participants were asked whether, additionally, they would like to take the researcher on a 'Go-Along' to places meaningful to them. Ten of the 22 participants agreed to take part in a 'Go-Along', which lasted between 45 minutes and nine hours²⁹ and which amounted to a total of 26 hours of interaction. The Go-Alongs consisted of walks (6), drives (1), a combination of driving and walking (2) and one home visit³⁰. While seven of these Go-Alongs took place in Dublin, three of them took place in towns and villages across Ireland. Six of the 10 'Go-Alongs' were audio-recorded with the use of a lapel microphone³¹, resulting in nine of the 26 hours of conversations being recorded, which were later transcribed and coded. Field notes were written up immediately after concluding each 'Go-Along' to summarise the topics discussed, to capture reflections on how these topics relate to the research questions and to reflect on the process of the 'Go-Along' itself. In cases where no audio was recorded³², field notes focused on capturing the conversation in more detail. Additionally, an online map plotting tool³³ was used to record the routes taken by us during the 'Go-Along'. These maps supported the researcher in remembering what locations had been referenced and what had been talked about during the 'Go-Along' when writing field notes.

²⁹ The 'Go-Along' that lasted nine hours was an exception insofar as the average duration of the other nine 'Go-Alongs' was just below two hours. Due to the length of this interaction, this 'Go-Along' was not recorded.

³⁰ One participant invited me to her home as an alternative to taking me for a 'Go-Along' due to persistent rain.

³¹ While noise caused by wind, rustling clothes and traffic can pose challenges to recording audio during 'Go-Alongs', the audio quality was surprisingly good with the exception of one Go-Along where the rustling of clothes tuned out lengthy parts of the conversation. Conscious of this risk, audio quality was always checked right after the 'Go-Along' and in this particular case more detailed fieldnotes were taken to account for the patchy audio recording.

³² Reasons for not audio recording 'Go-Alongs' varied, while one participant did not agree to be recorded, another reason for not recording was the length of the interview. In one specific case, the 'Go-Along' lasted a full day and it would have not been feasible to transcribe that many hours of 'Go-Along' recording. In addition, the researcher initially felt that audio recording 'Go-Alongs' might pose risks to the anonymity of the participant due to the visibility of the microphone and, importantly, might hinder participants from feeling at ease during the 'Go-Along'. However, a test run revealed that the microphone was unintrusive and was subsequently offered to participants. I made sure to explain the functionalities of the recorder at the start of each 'Go-Along' so that participants were free to pause and start the recording in whatever way they saw fit.

³³ A online route mapping tool, commonly used to plan runs or walks, was used to document the route taken and places visited during the 'Go-Along'.

As outlined earlier, the use of 'Go-Alongs' had three main aims: to shift the power balance in favour of the research participant; to gain a better understanding of how participants relate to the spaces they inhabit; and to enable new modes of learning about their lived experiences (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019). The 'Go-Along' succeeded in shifting the power balance in favour of the research participant in three important ways. First, by choosing the places visited, research participants had control over what topics they wanted to talk about. Interestingly, these were often places where they experienced acceptance and sense of belonging; for example, places where they had received support in finding housing or accessing education and recreational spaces such as sea sides and parks. Places where people experienced exclusion were usually not part of the list of places the participant actively wanted to show but were rather encountered along the way in an unplanned manner. This may have been a strategy used by participants to shift the narrative towards more positive aspects of life in Ireland as an alternative to concentrating on the difficult aspects that they had discussed in some detail during their interview.

A second indicator that the power balance may have shifted was that participants were more likely to ask me questions about myself, my family and my life in Ireland. 'Go-Alongs' were also likely to end with an embrace, which did not generally occur after an in-depth interview, demonstrating that walking side by side with participants fostered connections that were less formal in nature. A final indicator of a shift in the power dynamics was that each 'Go-Along' was completely different in terms of the places we visited, the topics we spoke about, how many places we visited, whether we walked or drove by car, how much time we spent together and how fast we walked.

When reflecting on the various walks, it became apparent that not every 'Go-Along' was a 'Go-Along' in a classic sense, whereby the researcher walks along with the participant while the participant engages in everyday activities (Kusenbach, 2003). Rather, some walks resembled what O'Neill and Roberts (2019) describe as a 'drift'; a walk around a particular place without a fixed route, which sets the scene for a more open-ended conversation but "still with a purpose: to understand the thoughts, identity, and outlook of an individual and their relationship with their current environment, relationships, and circumstances" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.38). Examples of so-called 'drifts' included walks in parks that held meaning for participants. On the other hand, there were walks where participants had a clear route planned consisting of various locations that they wanted to show and discuss. Then again, some walks represented the more classic 'Go-Along', where I accompanied the research participant in everyday activities like sharing a

meal, visiting the seaside or browsing in a shop. This diversity in terms of the nature of the walks strongly suggests that participants felt comfortable engaging with the 'Go-Alongs' as they wished and preferred.

While it was intended to give full control to participants over the topics discussed during the 'Go-Alongs', I noticed that there are many ways of guiding a conversation without asking a question. My first 'Go-Along' was with a research participant who was walking quite fast. When we walked past the DP centre where he had lived, I deliberately slowed down as I was interested in hearing more about his time there. In slowing down and finally stopping, we spent some time in front of the building, prompting him to share more about what it was like to live there. Another theme that arose during these walks, was the urge to fill silences that might occur during a 'Go-Along' (Stiegler, 2021). While silences can occur during in-depth interviews, they were more common during walks. At times, it was physically not possible to speak because we were eating; or someone would fall silent when focusing on the traffic while crossing the street; and sometimes silence signalled reflection, emotion or fatigue. While I often felt the urge to fill silences, I made a conscious effort to allow for lengthy silences and to trust that process.

The second aim, to learn more about how people relate to the places they inhabit, was achieved as participants offered detailed narratives of what various places meant to them, their encounters at different sites and how these encounters shaped their thinking. With 'Go-Alongs', it is not only the narratives that provide opportunities to gain a fuller understanding of the person's experiences; observing participants and how they move in space, which routes they take and how they encounter shopkeepers, friends and support workers provide insights into how participants relate to others and the environment around them. It is, however, important to acknowledge that such observed interactions unfold in the presence of the researcher, which can in turn influence the nature of the interactions (Stiegler, 2021).

Some participants explicitly mentioned that walking to places together triggered new memories. For example, as we walked, one participant remarked: "It is always strange, how I forget so many things and as I am just walking with you, they all start coming into my head" (Abhik, RP9). Some months later, when data collection resumed after the first Covid-19 lockdown, another participant explained that he was remembering as we were walking the streets of Dublin: "There are, I mean, very interesting stories, I mean, the things are just popping up, randomly" (Nauman, RP10). While 'Go-Alongs' can usefully trigger memories, they are, nonetheless, geographically limited. For example, an in-depth

interview allows the researcher to cover a range of topics that are not connected to the interview location while, with 'Go-Alongs', the conversation is more likely to be focused on the places visited. One participant, in fact, pointed out this limitation, saying: "There are so many other things to share about this country, about this city, but I think, I selected for you the top three or four buildings, which are around and which are in the range of a nice walk" (Nauman, RP10). A further limitation is that, when walking together, there can be very many distractions, particularly in a busy city, which may sometimes interrupt the flow of a conversation and also lead to a sudden change of topic and shift attention from an issue of interest.

The final aim of using the 'Go-Along' was to open up sensory ways of knowing, which, in the context of this study, included the sharing of food or experiencing a sudden change in the weather. Many of the participants came from countries with vibrant food cultures and food featured strongly in many of our interactions and conversations. I felt it was a plus that I had spent considerable time with my in-laws in Rajasthan, India, which supported me in being more perceptive and attuned to the manifold functions that food can have in some cultures. Finally, 'Go-Alongs' also generated instances of deep emotional connection; such as when participants recounted pivotal moments in their housing journeys at the very location where those moments occurred.

In summary, Go-Alongs proved to be a useful addition to the in-depth interview in shifting the power balance from the researcher to the research participant and allowing participants to take control of the conversation. While narrations during the in-depth interviews often focused on challenging experiences during their housing journey, the Go-Alongs offered participants opportunities to highlight spaces where they had experienced a sense of belonging and acceptance. Finally, the use of Go-Alongs yielded a more rounded and nuanced understanding of how participants relate to the spaces they inhabit and opened new sensory ways of observing their lived experiences.

4.6. Data Analysis

The study's data analysis procedures were aligned with the case study methodology (Harrison et al., 2017; Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995) and guided by the housing pathway approach (Clapham, 2005) as well as Bourdieu's (1977) *Theory of Practice*. The analysis was carried out concurrently with the data collection process. The raw data consisted of the transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews and 'Go-Alongs' as well as field notes

capturing the researcher's reflections on the research questions after each interaction in the field³⁴.

4.6.1. Data Analysis

While field notes are a valuable tool in recording emerging themes, reflecting on the interview technique and identifying the focus of subsequent interviews, the verbatim transcription of interviews allowed for a far more in-depth understanding of the interviews. Recognising the value of timely transcription, I aimed to schedule interviews in a way that would allow me to transcribe the interview within two or three days of the interview taking place. I outsourced one transcription, which I subsequently re-read multiple times, not least to fill in any missing data. Each transcript was assigned an individual identifier and all identifying information such as the names of places, family members and so on, was removed from the transcripts. Transcribing, coding and re-reading the transcripts several times can be an emotionally draining process (Kiyimba and O'Reilly, 2016), and the regular meetings with a psychologist, were important in supporting reflection on this process.

This research project followed the data analysis process proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which is iterative, conducted in parallel with the data collection, and focused on the continuous refinement of the 'categories' constructed from the data (Miles et al., 2014). Continuous analysis during the data collection process had numerous advantages. First, it supported a continuous critical reflection on the interview practice and offered a chance to improve one's interviewing skills (Brinkmann, 2018). Second, continuous data analysis encouraged the continuous development of the themes (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). Lastly, ongoing data analysis allowed the researcher to recognise saturation, when reached, thereby reducing the risk of over-recruitment (Bowen, 2008).

Before the data were analysed in depth, the interview data were structured using a mix of structural and descriptive codes, including 'Life in DP', 'Transition', 'Housing after DP', 'Health', 'Education' and so on. The data analysis process comprised First-Cycle coding "to retrieve and categorize similar data chunks" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72), with a

³⁴ While field notes written up after interviews and 'Go-Alongs' represented the main body of field notes, field notes were also written on other occasions such as following interactions with gatekeepers, when or after attending events, or after any other interaction that was deemed to progress learning about the research questions.

particular focus on In Vivo and Process coding³⁵ (Saldaña, 2021). Throughout the process of analysis, transcripts as a whole and excerpts were read, coded, re-read and re-coded multiple times as codes were continuously refined. This process was supported by the qualitative data management software NVivo. In a Second Cycle, the codes were summarised into themes or categories (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014). While the First-Cycle coding resulted in 238 codes, these were subsequently refined into 20 distinct categories during the second phase of coding.

Based on this second cycle of coding and the re-reading of transcripts, written case summaries (Appendix G) for each participant were prepared to detail key data under each of these categories. As mentioned earlier, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, these pseudonyms are used throughout the findings chapters when presenting narrative excerpts from the study's participants. To support the analysis, participants' housing journeys were visualised chronologically on paper, documenting the places where they lived since their arrival in Ireland, the duration of their stay, as well as key events such as the birth of a child or gaining status (Appendix H). In addition, a visual mind map was drawn for each participant in order to capture their social networks, cultural and economic capital as well as any additional themes that appeared particularly relevant to the participant's identity. While the chronological timelines facilitated the comparing and contrasting of participants' housing journeys, the mind maps proved particularly helpful in thinking about the forms of capital to which participants had access.

Analytic memos played an important role in developing theoretical insights and were written alongside the process of data collection and analysis and during the writing-up process in order to capture the researcher's continuously developing reflections and thoughts on the research process (Miles et al., 2014). These memos were recorded in a Word document and captured the researcher's reflections on emerging themes as well as the connections between these themes with a view to developing theoretical assertions (Stake, 1995). Theoretical assertions were developed through the process of 'progressive focusing', which involved the repeated examination of observations made (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012; Stake, 1995).

Further, when preparing analytic memos, specific attention was paid to examining both commonalities and distinctions across the various cases and to identifying potential

³⁵ In Vivo codes refer to codes that directly quote a term or phrase used by a participant. Process codes, on the other hand, describe a specific process, e.g. 'persuading a landlord'.

explanations for these observed patterns. These memos also provided the space to link and compare emerging theoretical assertions to existing theories, particularly Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). Bourdieu's conceptual tools of field, practice and habitus (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992) provided not only a theoretical framework but also an analytical lens that focused attention on how the characteristics of fields such as DP or the private rental market shaped participants' practices and their access to different forms of capital.

4.6.2. *Ensuring Rigour of the Research*

Tracy (2010) suggests 'rich rigour' as a quality criterion of qualitative research. Qualitative research that fulfils the criterion of 'rich rigour' "uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs" (Tracy, 2010, p.840); demonstrates that adequate time has been spent in the field gathering sufficient data to evidence assertions made; that the sample fits the purpose of the research; and that data has been collected and analysed with care.

This research applied a purposive sampling technique to increase the diversity of perspectives on the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007). While the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic made recruitment more challenging, the resulting use of a wide range of recruitment avenues permitted the recruitment of a sample of diverse participants in terms of gender, family composition, country of origin and housing experiences. The time spent in the field totalled 19 months: six months between October 2019 and March 2020 and 13 months between October 2020 and October 2021. Although the disruption of data collection due to the pandemic lasted for six months and negatively affected participant recruitment, it also provided an extended period of reflection on the data collection process to date and permitted the progression of data analysis, the development of theoretical thought and the preparation of a revised interview schedule, all of which ultimately improved the rigour of the research project.

Importantly, the combined use of in-depth interviewing with the ethnographic approach of the 'Go-Along' generated diverse experiences and perspectives through different modes of observation. Method triangulation therefore bolstered the development of a more rigorous and nuanced understanding of the case under investigation (Tracy, 2010).

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has documented the methodological, epistemological and ethical approach that guided the design of the research, with a particular focus on how the case study approach used method triangulation to gain a multifaceted understanding of refugees' housing journeys in Ireland. The chapter has provided a detailed account of the fieldwork conducted, including the challenges encountered during the different phases of participant recruitment, while striving for a sample that permitted the study of diverse housing journeys. The discussion of the experience of conducting in-depth interviewing and 'Go-Alongs' directed particular attention to the impact of Covid-19, which led to the introduction of online interviewing. Finally, the data analysis procedures, which included the preparation of case summaries and analytic memos, as well as an in-depth coding process, was conducted iteratively alongside data collection. Overall, the research design and its use of method triangulation permitted a participatory, reflective and nuanced study of refugees' housing journeys situated in the social, political and cultural context of Ireland.

5. The Field of Direct Provision

This is the first of four chapters to report the findings arising from an in-depth analysis of the data collected during the course of this research. This chapter introduces the participants and details their experiences of entering the asylum system and the field of Direct Provision (DP). It starts by documenting participants' socio-demographic characteristics and the different ways in which they entered the asylum process. This is followed by a detailed discussion of DP as a distinct field of housing, with particular attention paid to participants' experiences of living in DP, their journeys through DP and the practices they developed in response to this DP system. The chapter specifically examines mobility and immobility patterns as well as the housing conditions within DP. It also explores refugees' everyday lives, which were characterised by persistent poverty, hierarchical relations between residents and staff, as well as tensions among residents. The chapter concludes by documenting participants' adaptations to this field of housing through the development of practices of avoidance and resistance, which they devised in their attempts to evade the control exerted by the DP system.

5.1. The Study's Research Participants

As documented in Chapter Four, the research involved a sample of 22 individuals, comprising 10 women and 12 men. This gender breakdown closely corresponds to the prevailing gender ratio of individuals attaining status in Ireland. For instance, in 2018, women made up 47% of all individuals who gained status (Groarke and Brazil, 2020, p.42).

The age distribution of the sample also closely resembles the age demographics of the general DP population of which, in 2020, 43.2% were between the ages of 18 and 34 and 35.9% were between the ages of 35 and 64 years (Day, 2020p. 31). The youngest participant arrived in Ireland at the age of 14 and the oldest at the age of 47 years. Eleven of the participants were between the age of 18 and 34 years when living in DP, while 10 were between the age of 35 and 64.

Participants' countries of origin reflect the diversity of the Irish DP population, with participants coming from countries including Albania, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, South Africa, Eritrea, Congo, South Sudan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. This diversity in terms of nationality is broadly consistent with Ireland's refugee population (Groarke and Brazil, 2020). While 12 participants had travelled directly from their home countries to Ireland, 10 had lived for extended periods in situations of

displacement in countries such as Turkey, Greece, Kenya, United Arab Emirates, Uganda and South Africa before travelling onwards³⁶.

The household composition of the study's families spanned from nuclear family households to single households (see Table 1). Two of the women, one who had arrived on her own and one with her spouse, were pregnant upon arrival. For many participants, moving to Ireland led to a period of prolonged separation from family members, with four participants having had spouses and five having had children living in other countries when they arrived.

Table 1 Participants' Household Composition at the Point of Arrival

Participants' Household Composition at the Point of Arrival	Participants	Number of Households
Family (two parents with children)	Rafiq, Nabil, Malika, Nora	4
Single	Reza, Sherko, Yohana, Nauman ^{*^} , Mohammad, Rasheed ^{*^} , Abeni, Chantal, Rose [^] (pregnant), Peter [*]	10
Couple	Nasrin, Abhik (wife pregnant)	2
Single Mother	Grace, Busiswe ^{*^} , Yonas (adult son of single mother)	3
Arrived with a sibling	David, Faiza	2
Arrived with a friend	Aleksander [*]	1
Total		22

*child(ren) abroad, ^spouse abroad

This brief overview of socio-demographic characteristics of participants at the point of arrival provides a first indication of the diversity of the study's participants; demonstrating that sample diversity in terms of age, gender, country of origin and

³⁶ Ireland is located far from traditional refugee routes in Europe such as the Mediterranean or the Balkan route, thereby less likely to experience large number of arrivals on foot, road, train or boat. Participants in this study have mostly arrived by plane, either with a tourist or a student visa, or then by having organised documents through smugglers.

household composition was achieved, which was important in terms of capturing the breadth of experiences and situations of refugees in Ireland. The next section will explore the manner in which participants entered the asylum process in Ireland, followed by an analysis of their experiences of DP.

5.2. Applying for Asylum

Most of the participants who travelled to Ireland sought international protection immediately following their arrival, apart from three participants – Faiza, Yonas and Abhik – who had arrived in Ireland prior to seeking asylum through student, family reunification and tourist visas. For a majority of participants, seeking asylum presented a choice of last resort, with Abhik commenting: *“I know that the system doesn’t have a very good reputation. So, I was very worried of course. But still better than having no money or no food”* (Abhik, RP9). Faiza, who had come to Ireland with her brother, was the only participant who, out of fear, did not enter the DP system while waiting on the outcome of her asylum application: *“We were afraid that they would lock us down and that they would take our freedom”* (Faiza, RP18).

Social connections, including family connections and friendships, played a role in guiding participants’ migratory journeys, with at least six of the 22 participants having prior social connections to Ireland. Yet, most participants were keen to emphasise that these social connections were not the main reason for coming to Ireland but, rather, the fact that they had to flee situations of persecution and war, as Nora explained: *“We didn’t come because of him [my uncle], but we came because of our story back home. We had to leave our home”* (Nora, RP14). Thus, while family connections may have played a role in choosing the destination country, it was not generally the primary driver for migrating; rather, migration was prompted by the need to escape a variety of difficult or life-threatening situations (Collyer, 2005).

The EU Dublin regulation, which is an EU directive, requires refugees to seek international protection in the first safe country they enter (Brekke and Brochmann, 2014). Consequently, asylum seekers who travel through other European countries before arriving in Ireland are instructed to return to their initial country of entry in order to have their application processed. Although a decision such as this one can be appealed, the likelihood of success in Ireland is typically low, with only 13% of appeals successful in 2019 (A. Sheridan, 2020, p.47). Despite this barrier, two male research participants – Rasheed and Nauman – found a way to circumvent these rules. At the airport, Rasheed was asked

to sign a document stating that he had arrived through another European country. Being knowledgeable about the implications and official regulations, he refused to sign, leading the immigration officials to eventually permit his entry without applying the Dublin regulations.

“They told me they will send me back to France and ‘please sign here’. I said, ‘I can’t sign here’. They talked badly, and I shouted a little bit [...] Later another person came, ‘okay, no problem, please follow me’” (Rasheed, RP12).

Nauman, who was considered under the Dublin regulations, lost his appeal after 15 months. Upon conducting a thorough review of the relevant legislation, he discovered that if the Irish state could not transfer him to the other country within 18 months, he could remain in Ireland. With the assistance of Irish friends, he chose to go into hiding for 18 months. Reflecting on the entire experience, he commented: *“Thank god I had a good education, a good understanding, I’ve read everything about the European law, about the Dublin regulations II and III”* (Nauman, RP10). In Rasheed’s and Nauman’s cases, a good understanding of the legal situation provided both men with the knowledge and resources to successfully navigate these bureaucratic procedures. This knowledge can thus be considered a form of navigational cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

Finally, two of the participants, Malika and Mohammad, arrived in Ireland at the end of 2016 through the Greece Relocation Programme. Mohammad’s and Malika’s vulnerability played a key role in getting selected for this relocation programme. Mohammad had a medical condition that required him to have access to regular scans and appropriate medication which were not accessible in the refugee camp where he lived. Malika’s husband, on the other hand, was in urgent need of surgery due to a leg injury caused by the bombardment of his workplace in Syria. Malika suspected that this was the reason why they were chosen for the programme.

“Maybe I got that [the chance to move to Ireland], because my husband has [issues] with the leg, the Government helped him and helped all the family” (Malika, RP13).

For both Malika’s husband and Mohammad, the Irish Government’s recognition of their ‘vulnerability’ was essential since it was one of the eligibility criteria for the relocation scheme. This resonates with research conducted in Greece, which has shown that vulnerability represents a significant criterion when Governments identify individuals and families for additional support, including relocation (Kofman, 2019; Spathopoulou et

al., 2020). Findings presented in Chapters Six and Seven will show that having arrived through the relocation scheme, meant that Malika and Mohammad were afforded access to additional supports, with direct consequences for their housing journeys in Ireland.

5.3. Housing Journeys within Direct Provision

Having documented the different ways that participants applied for asylum, this section examines how Direct Provision shaped participants' early housing journeys in Ireland. Housing that provides a sense of control, security and familiarity is arguably particularly important to making a home in the context of displacement (Boccagni, 2017; Brun and Fábos, 2015). This section analyses Direct Provision as a distinct field of housing (Bourdieu, 2000; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). Specifically, it examines patterns of involuntary mobility resulting from the policy of dispersal and how, despite the restrictive system in place, some participants succeeded in carving out advantageous housing journeys. The section concludes by discussing the negative impacts of overcrowded, low-quality and segregated accommodation on participants' sense of control.

5.3.1. Patterns of Mobility and Immobility

In several European countries, the provision of institutionalised forms of refugee accommodation is combined with policies of dispersal (V. Robinson et al., 2003; Schuster, 2005). Similarly in Ireland, as outlined in Chapter 1, the Irish Government's dispersal system aims to accommodate newly arriving international protection applicants in accommodation centres across the country. Consequently, this policy significantly influences the initial housing journeys and related experiences of refugees.

Once participants applied for international protection, they were brought to the Baleskin reception centre, which is located on the outskirts of Dublin³⁷. This initial reception centre provided temporary accommodation for between two and three months³⁸, at which point participants were moved to permanent accommodation centres in locations across the country. At this stage, all participants stated that they had no control over the destination of their transfer. Rasheed explained that he would have preferred to live in Dublin as it would have offered him better opportunities to find employment and to build social connections. Yet, he felt that there was little scope for

³⁷ A small number of participants were sent directly to accommodation centres in cases where there was a shortage of spaces in Baleskin.

³⁸ This initial reception centre offers access to medical care and supports new arrivals with navigating the administrative process of registering for the Personal Public Service (PPS) or the medical card.

negotiation at that juncture: “*They were very strict at this point, you have to wait, once your name comes to move, you have to move*” (Rasheed, RP12). Abeni explained that refusing to avail of the transfer was not an option as it would mean losing access to state-provided accommodation.

“So either you go where they tell you that you have to go or you go looking for a different accommodation” (Abeni, RP17).

Twelve of the participants were transferred to rural locations and towns with limited access to employment or educational offerings and constrained opportunities to build social connections; four were transferred to Dublin and four to cities other than Dublin across the country (see Table 2). One participant did not enter DP, while another gained status while living in the reception centre. Table 2 presents data on 20 of the 22 participants. Aleksander gained status while staying in Baleskin and, as a result, was not transferred to a DP centre while Faiza did not enter the DP system.

Table 2 Initial Location of Dispersal

Location	Participants
Rural	Yonas, Mohammad, Malika, Grace, Busiswe
Town	Rafiq, Reza, Sherko, Yohana, Nora, Abeni, Peter
City	Nasrin, Rasheed, Chantal, Rose
Dublin	Nabil, Abhik, Nauman, David

****City** (>50,000 inhabitants); **Town** (1,500-49,999 inhabitants); and **village** (<1,500 inhabitants)

Although the Dispersal System did not confer any element of choice in relation to transfer location, individuals who received support and advocacy from medical professionals and/or solicitors had an increased likelihood of remaining in, or near, Dublin. Nauman, for example, who had accessed psychological support services in Baleskin, told that his psychologist had written a letter to the Reception and Integration Agency³⁹ (RIA) recommending that he be transferred to a centre close to Dublin: “My

³⁹ The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) was the prior name of the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) and had responsibility for the accommodation of international protection applicants.

psychologist referred me and she wrote a letter to the RIA, that ‘this person should stay in Dublin’ (Nauman, RP10). Yohana, on the other hand, who had attended multiple medical appointments in Dublin, was initially moved out of Dublin and required the intervention of her solicitor to secure a transfer back to Dublin.

“My case is in Dublin, I had therapy and all that because I was really stressed at the time, so that is why my solicitor was bringing me here [Dublin]” (Yohana, RP4).

Once participants had been transferred from Baleskin to a DP centre, a change in personal circumstances – related, for example, to physical or mental health, pregnancy or domestic abuse – could lead to a transfer to another DP centre. Busiswe, for example, decided to leave her abusive husband with the support of a domestic violence service. When the threats from her husband continued, she was eventually transferred to another centre.

“He continued to be very abusive, so I was relocated, because of how unsafe it was for us [referring to daughter] with him around” (Busiswe, RP19).

Table 3 provides an overview of the different reasons for transfers among study participants, including transfers for medical and family reasons, participant-initiated transfers to get closer to educational opportunities, transfers resulting from DP centre closures, and participants who experienced no transfer after the initial transfer from Baleskin to a DP centre.

Table 3 List of Reasons for Transfers within the DP System

Reason for Transfer	Participants affected
Medical (appointments/stress)	Yonas, Yohana, Rafiq, David
Family (pregnancy/domestic violence)	Abeni*, Busiswe, Chantal
Education (more opportunities)	Sherko, Abeni*
DP Centre Closure	Yonas, Nabil, Abhik, Nora ⁴⁰ , David, Busiswe, Abeni*, Peter
No Transfer (after initial transfer)	Reza, Nasrin, Mohammad, Rasheed, Malika, Grace, Rose, Nauman

*Abeni experienced a total of four transfers, corresponding to three distinct reasons for transfer.

Table 3 shows that six participants had a transfer approved to accommodate their personal circumstances – related to medical or family circumstances – suggesting that vulnerability acted as a criterion for the allocation of accommodation within the DP system, similar to what has been observed in the Greece Relocation Scheme (Kofman, 2019; Spathopoulou et al., 2020). While some participants' changing circumstances was promptly accommodated, others had to invest considerable effort and time in convincing centre management and the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS)⁴¹ that a transfer was necessary. Chantal, for example, met her partner soon after arriving in Ireland and became pregnant. She faced difficulties during childbirth and health issues, leading her to seek a transfer in order to be closer to her partner's location. Initially rejected by centre management and IPAS, she eventually convinced a visiting Ombudsman team⁴² to support her transfer request: "*When I see them [Ombudsman team] I talk to them about my situation, so they said, 'No, you cannot stay here', so they helped me*" (Chantal, RP20). Similarly, Rafiq invested considerable time and effort in securing a

⁴⁰ An increase in single, male asylum seekers in 2015 meant that the DP centre Nora and her family lived in was turned into a centre for single males only which resulted in Nora's family being moved to another centre.

⁴¹ While International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) had the ultimate responsibility to arrange and agree transfers, participants' accounts suggest that managers of DP centres had significant say in whether a transfer request was granted or not.

⁴² The Ombudsman examines complaints in relation to public service providers including DP centres and the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS).

transfer for his wife and new-born child. Sharing common areas with other residents, such as bathrooms and living spaces, was challenging for his wife, who wore a Hijab and had to fully dress each time she used the facilities. While the centre management initially denied Rafiq's request for transfer, Rafiq eventually managed to arrange the transfer with the support of his GP.

"[The GP letter] attracted people's attention to us. Especially the management. Because they don't obey or listen to you when you are saying something. They don't take it as a serious matter. [...] But when you have support, like these official people, like GP, he can do something" (Rafiq, RP5).

These two examples demonstrate that while the dispersal system is generally a no-choice system, some participants succeeded in arranging a transfer by investing time and effort into convincing "official people" to support their transfer request. Advocating for a transfer to another location provided Sherko and Abeni with better access to education, improved Rafiq's accommodation situation, allowed Yohana to have better access to medical care and, meant that Chantal could live closer to her partner. These cases reveal the importance of social connections to "official people" who advocated on the participants' behalf and whose opinions carried weight. Connections to professionals such as GPs or solicitors, resemble what Ryan et al. (2008) have described as 'vertical weak ties', which refers to the ties that connect individuals in disadvantaged positions to individuals in more advantageous positions.

The closures of some DP centres⁴³ meant that eight participants had to transfer to another centre. Participants experienced these unplanned transfers as particularly difficult. Nabil and his family, for instance, were moved from Dublin's city centre to the outskirts of the city, which meant that Nabil had to invest significant time in organising the move and in ensuring continuity for his children's education by advocating for the provision of a school bus. In Abhik's case, the centre closure meant that the friends he made in that accommodation setting were dispersed across the country, leaving him feeling isolated and lonely. For both participants, these unplanned transfers following the closure of DP centres led to a significant disruption of their everyday lives. This finding echoes those of Ziersch et al. (2017) who, as part of a qualitative study into the impact of

⁴³ One of the DP centres was subsequently turned into student accommodation, another one into emergency homeless accommodation and a third centre was sold with the intention of turning it into hotel accommodation.

housing on refugees' and asylum seekers' well-being, found that moving could be highly disruptive to social networks and exacerbate feelings of a lack of control.

In summary, the field of Direct Provision was characterised by a high degree of involuntary mobility arising as a direct consequence of the policy of dispersal, with negative consequences for participants' access to employment, education and social networks and their sense of control. Yet, there were two important exceptions to this. First, the system accounted for individual vulnerabilities in allowing for transfers for medical and family reasons. Second, vertical weak ties (Ryan et al., 2008) to 'official people' allowed participants to carve out more advantageous housing journeys within what was a highly restrictive system. Centre closures, on the other hand, increased involuntary mobility, with negative consequences for participants' social networks and their sense of control over their everyday lives (Ziersch et al., 2017).

5.3.2. *Overcrowded, Low-Quality and Segregated Accommodation*

Having examined patterns of im/mobility within the DP system, this subsection provides a more detailed account of the accommodation provided by the DP system. Consistent with the existing literature on DP (C. Breen, 2008; Fanning et al., 2001; Nedeljkovic, 2018), life in DP almost inevitably meant living in low-quality accommodation characterised by a lack of physical space, overcrowding and segregation. A majority of participants reported that the sharing of bedrooms and bathrooms meant that they did not have privacy or a sense of control in their most intimate living spaces. Single participants reported that they shared a room with up to five other people. Living in such close physical proximity to others who did not have the same daily schedules or routines was described as extremely challenging. Yohana, for instance, explained that she would have liked to rest after returning from volunteer work at a local charity shop but that this was impossible when roommates had visitor(s) or were talking on the phone.

"When I was working at the charity shop, I would be tired and I went to school as well, I want to go to my room and rest. When I come maybe they [roommates] will be with a man in the room and I was getting angry, but I know I have no option. They cannot give me a separate room, so I had to accept it" (Yohana, RP4).

The only exception to having to share a bedroom was David, who was 18 years old when he arrived in Ireland in 2014, suggesting that, at that time, the accommodation system had greater capacity to take individual vulnerabilities into account when allocating rooms. Compared to single households, family households had more privacy because they

were usually accommodated in one room; yet, rooms were usually small and congested. Nabil and his pregnant wife, for example, shared a small room with their three young children before they received a transfer to another centre in which they were assigned two bedrooms. Busiswe, who shared a room with her young daughter, described the room situation as very limiting, while Rose felt that once she had her baby, the room “started to get smaller”.

“It was like a room in a hostel, you know. Very limited space and a small shower. So you didn’t have that freedom that comes with having a home. You are just limited to this room” (Busiswe, RP19).

“By the time I delivered [the baby], [the room] started to get smaller, so you have no choice, ‘that’s what you have’, I had to just get used to that space” (Rose, RP21).

Single women who were pregnant with their first child often stayed in shared accommodation until their child was born or until the birth was imminent. Living in a congested space while pregnant was particularly challenging, as recounted by Chantal, who was sharing a room with two other women.

“I started to be pregnant there, you want to rest, you listen to music, and I told you at the beginning, African people are very loud, they shout, so you are constantly sh, sh, sh” (Chantal, RP20).

The absence of tenancy rights and the lack of privacy characteristic of refugee arrival infrastructures prompted Busch-Geertsema et al. (2016) to define this type of accommodation as a form of homelessness. In addition to the problem of overcrowding, many participants also commented on the low quality of the accommodation provided as well as centre managers' reluctance to complete repairs. Participants reported issues with bathroom leaks, poor-quality mattresses, bedbugs, mould, dampness and cold. It is important to note that there was significant variation between the DP centres. While most centres provided low-quality and cramped accommodation, one accommodation centre, a former holiday colony, was an exception in that it provided independent living quarters, allowing for more privacy and better-quality accommodation. However, apart from this exception and in line with Irish and international literature, study participants consistently described living in overcrowded and poor-quality accommodations, with negative impacts on their mental and physical well-being (C. Breen, 2008; Fanning et al., 2001; Higgins et al., 2019; Kreichauf, 2018).

The segregation experienced by participants while living in DP and the resulting stigmatisation added another layer of exclusion and stress to participants' lives. Several participants mentioned the stigmatising effects of residing in segregated DP centres. Yonas, for instance, pointed out that accommodating asylum seekers in camps provided fertile ground for stigmatisation: *"When you put [people seeking international protection] in a camp and call them asylum seekers, it doesn't look good. You being here. The system is the problem. It's not one's person's problem"* (Yonas, RP1). Grace further observed that being "from DP" meant that she was either viewed with sympathy or with suspicion.

"It's a lot like, a label hanging over you, the minute you say you're from [DP centre], any conversation you are having with anybody, it changed the mood [...] people are going to speak to you in a way that you know they feel pity for you or it was more that thing of 'ooh! so you have nothing to complain about because you are fully fed by the Government' and stuff like that" (Grace, RP16).

In brief, DP as a field of housing provided access to overcrowded and low-quality accommodation, with negative impacts on participants' sense of control, while the segregated nature of the centres contributed to their stigmatisation within Irish society. These findings are consistent with Kreichauf (2018), who observed in an analysis of refugee accommodation in Athens, Berlin and Copenhagen, that institutionalised forms of accommodation constituted spaces of stigmatisation and otherness. While the DP system provided shelter, it did not provide a sense of home or privacy and was essentially a form of undocumented homelessness (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2016; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010).

5.4. Becoming Poor

Financial resources play a significant role in determining refugees' well-being and their chances of successful settlement. Numerous studies have highlighted the critical role of financial resources and economic stability as key factors influencing refugees' capacity to rebuild their lives in countries of resettlement (Bloch, 2004; Şimşek, 2018). This section delves into the factors that impacted the financial situation of the study's participants. Specifically, it examines the provision of benefits-in-kind such as food, as well as their access to the labour market. By understanding these factors, valuable insights can be gained into how DP shaped participants' access to economic capital during the asylum process.

5.4.1. *The Benefits-in-Kind System*

At the time when DP was introduced in 2000, the weekly allowance for people living in these settings was €19.10 for adults and €9.60 for children. Only after 2016 did the Irish Government decide to gradually increase the rates, which reached €38.80 for an adult and €29.80 for a child in March 2019. While the DP system provides food as a benefit-in-kind, most participants spent at least part of their weekly allowance to cover additional food costs, leaving them with little money to cover other expenses or the ability to save money. The reasons for buying additional food identified by participants included mealtimes in DP centres, which overlapped with other activities; the fact that food provided was not to the participant's taste; or the food was considered to be of low quality. David, for example, spent his allowance on food because his college course schedule overlapped with the mealtime schedule of the DP centre where he lived.

"We were getting nineteen euro ten cents per week at the time, so if you're missing food, you have to spend money on food, no? So yeah, it was kind of difficult, especially for students, especially when I started going to college" (David, RP15).

Nabil, on the other hand, cited the quality and variety of food provided as a reason for spending a portion of his family's weekly allowance on food: *"The life here, it is a little bit difficult, especially for food [...] it's not good, it's not what we're used to"* (Nabil, RP8). Finding ways to prepare one's own food was in fact a common practice, particularly for families. Chantal, who had given birth to two of her children while living in DP, explained that providing good food for her children was a priority, prompting her to prepare meals secretly in her room.

"Food [provided in the canteen] is not like food that you can eat every day. Sometimes, we take money and we buy some food from outside. You can see the rice cooker, that's how I would cook food. I would make things that my kids can eat" (Chantal, RP20).

Thus, while the DP system provides food as a benefit-in-kind, in fact, many participants relied on their weekly allowance to cover grocery expenses, leaving them with little money to cover any other needs. The introduction of self-catering facilities⁴⁴, which

⁴⁴ Some self-catering centres had points systems in place that allocated residents a certain number of points each week which allowed to buy groceries in a dedicated on-site grocery shop. One centre gave cash to residents to cover all their expenses, including groceries and electricity. While this cash-based self-catered centre was an exception, it represents an interesting case in that it demonstrates the benefits people accrued from being allowed to manage their own finances.

was one of the key recommendations of the McMahon report (2015), provided greater flexibility in terms of buying and preparing food. While most participants stayed in DP centres where they received food as a benefit-in-kind, seven⁴⁵ had lived for at least parts of their stay in DP, ranging from a few months to a few years, in self-catering centres. David and his sister, for example, lived for several months in a self-catering centre. David spoke of the popularity of these self-catering centres among DP residents and how it allowed him to make his own financial decisions and to take care of himself.

“There were few self-catering centres and everybody wanted to be in them, because it was better than the Direct Provision. [...] in the self-catering system, they give you the money, so you take care of yourself” (David, RP15).

As David explained, when residing in this centre, he and his sister had far more autonomy and control over how they chose to spend the money allocated to them. While David lived for a few months in a cash-based self-catering centre, it was more common for self-catering centres to operate a points system: allocated points could only be used to buy groceries in the on-site shop; the points had to be used within a four-week period; and the system did not allow residents to compare prices or to choose a retail outlet with the most affordable options. While the points-based system meant that some participants could prepare their own food, it did not allow them to save money.

In summary, the provision of reduced welfare payments, combined with the provision of accommodation and food as benefits-in-kind, significantly reduced participants' access to economic capital, thereby severely limiting their financial autonomy (Fanning and Veale, 2004). While changes introduced in the aftermath of the publication of the McMahon report (2015) led to an increase in independent living facilities, these often operated on a the basis of points system, which did not allow the accrual of a fall-back in the event of having to deal with an unexpected expense. These findings echo the observations of Fanning and Veale (2004), who in an analysis of the Direct Provision system, concluded that the DP represents a system of state-imposed poverty and exclusion.

5.4.2. Barriers to Employment

In Ireland, asylum seekers were not permitted to work until the summer of 2018. As a consequence, a small number of participants had sought work in Ireland's informal

⁴⁵ Yonas, Nauman, Mohamad, Nora, Malika, David and Grace

economy in their efforts to improve their financial situations. These participants had worked in a range of occupations, including child minding, cleaning, factory work and working on farms. Busiswe and David both explained that taking up work, such as childcare or working on a farm, was a necessity because the financial support provided to them was simply not sufficient.

“19 euro, 10 cents, you know, that’s humiliating. So, it was a really, really, terrible, terrible, terrible. Some of us had to start minding, even though you were not allowed. Someone needed someone to mind their child, and they give you 10 or 20 euro, cleaning people’s home for extra income” (Busiswe, RP19).

“You definitely needed extra money. Like, you’re getting 24 euro per week from social, and the transport to come into town is 55 euro. So, of course, you needed extra money” (David, RP15).

While working improved David’s financial situation, it also made him vulnerable to exploitation: David was paid 50 euro for 12-hour working days on a farm, which equates to less than half of the legal minimum wage of 10.50 euro per hour: *“They know that you don’t have the paper, so they are going to exploit you most definitely. So, you know, you work for little money”* (David, RP15). Faiza, on the other hand, chose not to enter DP while applying for international protection and relied solely on cash payments from informal work for income during the asylum process. She worked as a live-in au pair, minding children, receiving a small salary, and often being asked to work beyond the agreed hours. Alongside economic exploitation, Faiza endured prejudicial and abusive comments from her employers.

“I was working forty hours a week for one hundred euro, which is not fair, and also you cannot complain because they know you don’t have status. So, even if they didn’t pay you, you have no right to ask them where is the money” (Faiza, RP18).

These accounts of working for cash payments clearly demonstrate that not having legal status or the right to work made participants vulnerable to exploitation and that the absence of legal protection meant that employers could take advantage of their precarious situations without consequence. Research on the labour market experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK similarly found that “employers or recruiters routinely instrumentally use migrants’ compromised socio-legal status to impose substandard working conditions, particularly on those working without permission” (Dwyer et al., 2016, p.194). All three participants who took up work in the informal economy were acutely

aware that they were being exploited but did not have either the 'status' or standing to challenge their employers.

The employment situations of asylum seekers in Ireland did improve in mid-2018, when the right to work was introduced. At that time, 11 of the study's participants were in the asylum process and, of these, six were eligible for the right to work⁴⁶. Four had been able to find work: Grace started to work as a carer in a nursing home; Busiswe secured a paid position with a local NGO; Abhik facilitated educational workshops on life in DP for an NGO; and Nauman worked in a range of settings, including a café, a pizzeria and a chocolate factory. Despite applying for work permits, Rasheed and Nabil did not take up employment. Rasheed gained status shortly after applying for the work permit, while Nabil was focused on organising his family's move to another DP centre. Nabil's wife, who had also applied for a work permit, did not take up work because of her childcare responsibilities. Just one participant, Abhik, stated that he felt uncomfortable applying for jobs using the work permit because it revealed his status as an asylum seeker.

People who entered the labour market continued to receive the weekly allowance. For Nauman, the income was a substantial financial improvement and meant that he was able to save money while continuing to live in DP. However, Grace's experience was different. While she continued to receive the weekly allowance, the additional benefits that she had previously availed of for herself and her two children were no longer paid, as she explained.

"When we were going to a hospital appointment you would get that allowance for the bus, or taxi, so that would be the things that would go and the things like the six months allowance for clothing and footwear, [...] so, it's all of these extras, like benefits, that you don't get once you start working" (Grace, RP16).

Thus, while Grace was earning an additional income, she did not feel that it allowed her to save since most of this income was consumed by payments that had been previously covered by some additional benefits for which she was no longer eligible. For 15 of the 22 participants, the welfare allowance provided by the Irish Government was their sole income, resulting in a life of poverty.

⁴⁶ Four of the five participants were in the appeal process and therefore excluded from the right to work. One participant received status before he was eligible to apply for work.

While this research did not aim to examine participants' economic situations prior to their arrival in Ireland, a number of accounts suggest that some participants had been financially comfortable or well-off before leaving their home countries (Şimşek, 2018). Nonetheless, while some may have had considerable wealth before coming to Ireland, savings were often used to pay for travel arrangements and, if there was some money left at the point of their arrival in Ireland, it was usually spent on securing access to daily necessities. Malika, for example, had to sell her house in order to finance her family's escape from war-torn Syria, while Nauman had used all of his savings to provide for his family, who remained in his home country: "*All of our savings that I had back in [home country] has gone*" (Nauman, RP10). Only one participant, Rasheed, reported that he was able to continue to draw on savings and his brother's financial support throughout the duration of the asylum process: "*I asked my brother to send me money and I have money [myself]. So I can spend money from my own*" (Rasheed, RP12). In the vast majority of cases, however, the cost of displacement meant that most participants, including those who were well-off in their home countries, were living at or below the poverty line within a short period of time of arriving in Ireland.

In summary, until the right to work was introduced, participants were highly vulnerable to living in poverty or experiencing labour exploitation (Dwyer et al., 2016). Only following the lifting of the work ban were a small number of participants able to improve their financial situations. Additionally, some participants were able to lean on family members for financial support (Şimşek, 2018). However, the limited scope of participants to acquire economic capital during the asylum process had direct consequences for their housing journeys after gaining status, as will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters. The following two sections examine the relations underpinning the field of DP; specifically, relationships among residents and relationships between residents and centre staff/management.

5.5. Life in a Superdiverse Setting

Social connections play a pivotal role in the successful integration and well-being of refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008). Being part of a supportive community can provide a sense of belonging and mutual assistance, which are essential to navigating the challenges of forced displacement (Hartmann, 2019; Korac, 2001). Residing in DP entailed living alongside individuals of various national backgrounds, with different languages, religions and cultures, and at different stages of their lives. As a result, the DP system exhibits an exceptionally high degree of diversity, culminating in a superdiverse space that

encompasses a tapestry of distinct lifestyles, identities, experiences, and practices (Vertovec, 2007). By understanding DP as a relational space (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992), this section examines the implications of this superdiversity on the relations among residents. Specifically, the section explores participants' experiences of tensions and conflict as well as the experience of supportive relationships and a sense of community.

5.5.1. *Tensions and Conflicts*

Participants reported that tensions within DP could arise among residents from different cultural and religious backgrounds, between family and single households, and between men and women. These tensions were significantly heightened by the lack of space and privacy. Rasheed, Yohana and Malika, for example, all spoke about how living in such close proximity with people from different cultures, who speak different languages and held different beliefs, rendered communication challenging and also made it difficult to establish connections with others.

"We are from different backgrounds, sometimes, you cannot understand other people and you cannot deal in a good way with them, and this is the main problem" (Rasheed, RP12).

"It's tough because you will live with different people, they have different attitudes, different behaviour, different culture, different dreams" (Yohana, RP4).

"I lived one year and one month between different people, from different countries, everyone has different languages, sometimes, I just look what are they saying, I don't know anything, it is very difficult" (Malika, RP13).

In addition, residents were at different stages of their lives and had, in many cases, very different routines and expectations: while some wanted to stay up late, others were trying to get their children to sleep early. Rose, for example, had just had her first baby while living in a DP centre when a new resident, with little understanding of her need for quiet, moved into the room next door. Although Rose brought the nightly noise disturbance to the attention of centre management, her complaints were not acted upon.

"When this lady came she was just free, doing anything she wanted, bringing in anyone she wanted, and whenever she wanted, whatever time, playing music, as loud as she wants, when people are sleeping. It was just too stressful for me and I brought it up with the management but there wasn't really a solution" (Rose, RP21).

Tensions could also arise within communities; for example, between conservative and liberal Muslims. This dynamic particularly affected liberal Muslims such as Nauman, who had been forced to leave his home country because of his publicly voiced liberal views. He experienced a social boycott when other community members became aware of his perspectives: *“They feel that I am not a good Muslim, then they socially boycotted me”* (Nauman, RP10). A small number of women also reported feeling uncomfortable and unsafe because of their close proximity to single men. Yohana and Busiswe both told that they did not feel safe in the communal spaces of the centres, which meant that they frequently withdrew to their rooms.

*“The men, they are not okay because they feel they will not have a better life after that. They are not patient as the women, the men, asylum seekers, they want women, they want to have sex with everyone and they are kind of like, you know, they will”*⁴⁷ (Yohana, RP4).

“You share [communal] spaces with men, whether you are comfortable or not comfortable around men, you know, if you wanted to come out of your tiny room” (Busiswe, RP19).

These narratives echo the findings documented by Hartmann (2019) based on an ethnographic study of women living in accommodation centres in Germany, who similarly reported that they felt unsafe in shared communal areas. Living with no privacy in a superdiverse environment therefore created tensions and placed residents at risk of experiencing religious and sexual harassment. Complaints to centre management about other residents’ behaviour were frequently met with inaction and residents were essentially left to their own devices in terms of managing these tensions. Only in cases where tensions escalated to physical violence were security guards and/or the police called upon to intervene.

Considering the challenges associated with having to share intimate living spaces with strangers, it is perhaps surprising that only one participant reported a physical altercation with another resident. Rafiq, who after arriving in Ireland, lived with his wife and baby in a single room while sharing a bathroom and living spaces with other residents reported regular conflicts with other DP residents.

⁴⁷ None of the participants disclosed having experienced sexual assaults while living in DP.

“It is not easy, every time you get upset, every time you get into conflict, shouting. You get people shoving you, trying to scare you or threatening you or abuse you by different means they have. So, at that time, I have found it very difficult” (Rafiq, RP5).

While the vast majority of participants did not report involvement in physical altercations, the number who had witnessed physical conflict was striking and impacted negatively on participants’ sense of security. When Busiswe was asked what made her feel that the DP centre was not a safe environment for her and her young daughter, she described having witnessed a game of pool which, within seconds, turned into a violent fight. Nauman similarly explained that witnessing fights among other residents made him feel psychologically unsafe and led to him turning inward.

“I remember one time some young men, they were playing pool, the next thing, they were coming out and they were hitting each other with the stick for the pool table, and within seconds away, fist exchanged, you know, a pool stick breaking someone’s body – just violence, you see blood and suddenly there are guards” (Busiswe, RP19).

“I see some people hitting and fighting, and I was just like this [showing how he was hiding]. So, it was psychologically not safe” (Nauman, RP10).

Only a small number of participants stated that they did feel safe or very safe in DP accommodation and this was almost always associated with the sense of protection from physical harm arising from the constant presence of security guards⁴⁸. To summarise, the accounts presented in this section strongly suggest that the tensions arising from living in close proximity to others in a superdiverse space led many participants to feel unsafe, prompting some to withdraw to their rooms and avoid communal areas. To a considerable extent, participants’ experiences echo those documented in Hauge et al.’s (2017) analysis of asylum accommodation in Norway, who similarly observed that overcrowding and the resulting lack of privacy frequently led to tensions between residents (Hauge et al., 2017).

5.5.2. *Building Community*

While the lack of privacy in DP created fertile ground for tensions among residents, there were also many examples of positive interactions, particularly when residents had opportunities to engage in shared activities such as social and leisure activities, and on-site classes. The fact that residents all had difficult and traumatic pasts presented further

⁴⁸ Participants reported the presence of security guards in most of the DP centres. While some participants felt safe due to their presence, others continued to feel unsafe.

opportunities for DP residents to connect with others who had similar experiences. The personal connections that many participants established played an important role in helping them to access information on the asylum process, find employment and/or enrol in training or educational courses. In addition to supporting better access to information, these networks provided practical support in the form of translation, childcare and help with filling out forms.

Shared activities and living alongside each other were key to forming social connections. Nora, for example, who had spent her teenage years living in the DP system, felt that these activities helped her to form friendships: *"In [DP centre] we had a lot of activities where people can get involved, where people can get to know each other, where you can make friends"* (Nora, RP14). However, most participants described the relationships built not as friendships but, rather, as a form of social connection typically experienced by neighbours. David, for example, felt that living so close to others meant that they inadvertently got to know each other as neighbours, while Grace described this connection as a form of camaraderie that developed based on residents' shared experience of applying for asylum.

"Yeah, I wouldn't really say make friends, I'd say, you know, just you are cool with people, it is people you see every day, so eventually you have to say like your name because you have to say hi to them, you are not necessarily friends, they are all your neighbours" (David, RP15).

"This is your community, this is your home, you need to get along somehow, so that was that, like a camaraderie. We are like all in the same situation, we are all facing the same problems" (Grace, RP16).

The DP centre itself, its size and its location, also seemed to impact whether participants were able to form these kinds of relationships. Abhik, who was moved from a smaller to a bigger centre after the DP centre, commented that, in the smaller centre, everyone knew each other, which made it easier to build friendships that endured beyond the closure of the centre.

"It is a small hostel, and we know each other and we made quite good connections there, and we still remain friends, even after we split. Yes, it was quite a good harmony there among the residents. I think the smaller centres were like that because everybody knows each other. It's easier" (Abhik, RP9).

While some centres were more conducive to forming relationships than others, all participants reported success in building a mix of strong and weak ties within the DP community, which provided support and/or access to information. Yet, while many reported instances of mutual support, the insecure status of being an asylum seeker at times impeded the dynamics of such support. Grace, for example, explained that residents were often torn between supporting each other and feeling the need not to get involved with other residents' lives, fearing that this could negatively impact their asylum application. She recalled one instance where a mother was taken to a psychiatric hospital, explaining that while one resident volunteered to look after the woman's children, many others felt torn about offering support.

"To us, it would be like, 'Oh well, I don't want to be involved in this because I have already my own things going on, I don't want people's problems, I don't want social workers knocking on my door, I don't want IPO [International Protection Office] knocking on my door, it might affect my asylum application'" (Grace, RP16).

In conclusion, while there were barriers to DP residents supporting each other – such as the fear that getting involved in each other's lives might negatively impact the asylum application process – the positive impacts of the social connections participants formed within DP were prominent in the accounts of a majority (Hartmann, 2019). These connections among residents, which consisted of close and weak ties, permitted the "co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993, p.35) and could therefore be considered as a form of social capital. This form of social capital also played an important role during the transition from DP to housing, a topic that is the subject of detailed analysis in Chapter Six.

5.6. A Hierarchical System of Control

The institutionalised and hierarchical nature of DP emerged as another key characteristic of life in DP. This section examines the role of centre staff and management in establishing a system of control within DP. Specifically, it analyses how this system of control operated through a mix of punishments and rewards and also explores the impact of these interactions on participants' experiences of life in DP.

Centre owners employed a variety of staff to ensure that the centres ran smoothly and efficiently. Roles included centre management, security personnel and receptionists. A key role of staff was to enforce adherence to the house rules that were in place in each centre, which also regulated the everyday lives of residents. Some participants received a

copy of the house rules when they entered DP accommodation while others learned about rules in a more ad hoc way, such as when they were informed that they were in breach of one of the rules. Centre staff, such as administrative staff, conducted regular room inspections to check for cleanliness and to ensure that no prohibited items such as rice cookers had been brought to the room while receptionists ensured that visitors signed in and out. Security personnel were present 24 hours per day and guarded the entrance of bigger centres as well as the centre grounds.

Participants frequently commented on the hierarchical nature of the relationship between the residents and centre management, with some participants describing the relationship as infantilising and imperialistic. Nauman, for example, depicted the centre management's attitude towards the residents as a form of enslavement in that they were given orders rather than engaged in a dialogue founded on an ethos of respect and equality. Abhik similarly explained that he felt treated like a child who was supervised through frequent room inspections.

"Centre management, centre owners, they treat the people imperialistically [...] 'If you cook, you clean!'; So this is the master sound, the master and slave sound [...] What I mean is, they command the people, they control the people as much as they can [laughs]. Yeah, so imperialistic" (Nauman, RP10).

"There was like a huuuge inspection for everything. You're like a child [laughs]. Somebody telling you what to do and what not to do and telling you off over even small errors" (Abhik, RP9).

While some participants emphasised that staff members, such as kitchen staff, behaved differently to the management in that they demonstrated a greater degree of kindness and understanding, others experienced their interactions with staff, particularly receptionists, as unhelpful and humiliating. Busiswe, for instance, felt deeply humiliated by having to ask a receptionist for essential items.

"The horrible, the inhumane living conditions of living in Direct Provision, of being constantly put down. Can you imagine an adult, going down to reception and asking for toilet tissue and you are told, no, only two or three a week?" (Busiswe, RP19).

Participants therefore frequently experienced interactions with centre staff and management as imperialistic, infantilising and inhumane. The power and control exerted by centre management and staff over residents in DP centres were closely linked to a discretionary system of power characterised by rewards and punishments. Centre

managers applied considerable discretion in the enforcement of house rules and in the provision of support to residents. This discretionary power was employed strategically to reward compliant residents while simultaneously punishing those who did not comply. Some participants, for example, reported that they had received additional support with tasks such as opening a bank account or arranging a transfer to another centre.

However, not all participants had access to the same level of support through centre management. Chantal, for example, observed that if the management was aware that a resident and was on good terms with him or her, that resident was more likely to be treated positively, which inevitably led to the unequal treatment of centre residents: *"If you please the woman, the man, the managers, you like it. But if they are not pleased, when you come [and ask for something], they say 'no mam' "* (Chantal, RP20). While Nabil observed a similar dynamic, he felt that, in general, strict rules were needed, possibly because he and his family were on good terms with the management, which meant that the rules were enforced in a more flexible manner.

"[The management] should have some strict rules, I can understand this. If they know the family, like our family, they know us, they say 'okay, just do'. But for new people, if they don't know them and, especially single men, they will be strict" (Nabil, RP8).

This system of privileges was closely intertwined with a system of sanctions since privileges given could be withdrawn at any time. Abeni, for example, recalled that the centre manager allowed them to cook but would threaten to withdraw this discretionary provision if the room designated for cooking was not cleaned.

"The manager kind of created a room whereby we can cook and, we had like an agreement, you cook you clean, so whenever someone would make a mess, he would lock the room and say no cooking for a week as a punishment" (Abeni, RP17).

While the withholding or removal of privileges was perceived a form of punishment, the threat of punishment also played a significant role; particularly, the threat that residents' actions or behaviours could have negative consequences for their asylum applications. While, from a legal point of view, centre managers had no power over the outcome of the asylum process, Rasheed was cautioned by other residents that non-compliance with rules or lodging a complaint could negatively impact his application.

"People are afraid to make complaints or to fight her [centre manager], and when I did, when I shouted at her, 'Don't think we are slaves', all the people told me, 'Don't

do that because she has the right, she would write a report and this report will affect you' ” (Rasheed, RP12).

None of the participants suggested that centre management had either a negative or positive impact on their asylum application. However, the fear of potential negative repercussions led some DP centre residents to feel reluctant to speak out about perceived injustices. This reluctance to speak out, in turn, reinforced the power dynamics present in the DP system.

In brief, the relations between centre residents and centre management/staff were characterised by a hierarchical system of control, which was experienced as imperialistic, infantilising and inhumane, and deeply affected the everyday lives of centre residents. The findings presented in this section therefore strongly echo Hewson's assertion that the DP system is characterised by hierarchical surveillance and the normalisation of judgment through punishments and rewards (Hewson, 2022). The following section explores how participants adapted their practice to the field of DP by developing strategies of avoidance and resistance.

5.7. Practices of Avoidance and Resistance

Everyday life within the field of DP was shaped by living in overcrowded, low-quality and segregated accommodation centres, the tensions and camaraderie arising from living in a superdiverse space, as well as the hierarchical relationship between centre management/staff and centre residents. This section examines the negative impacts of the DP system on residents' well-being before examining how participants adapted their practices to their new environment through the development practices of resistance and avoidance.

Living in DP had a profound impact on the participants' mental health. A majority reported deteriorated mental health – related to depression, anxiety or stress – since they entered the DP system. A wide variety of stressors were reported, many of them related to the challenge of coming to terms with traumatic experiences in their countries of origin. Practically all participants also described a raft of stressful experiences associated with the living conditions in DP, the humiliation they experienced in their interactions with DP staff and management, employment constraints, their exclusion from the community and the uncertainty of the asylum process. For most, separation from family, as well as ongoing anxiety about the safety of family members left behind in their home countries, featured prominently as a staple of everyday stress. For instance, when Yohana arrived in Ireland,

she was not able to eat the unfamiliar food, and felt lonely and helpless. She continued to remember her traumatic journey to Ireland, and felt that life had not changed for the better but rather that she had moved “to another jail”⁴⁹. And Rasheed explained how the uncertainty of the asylum process forced DP residents into a “panic situation”, which was exacerbated by the requirement of having to share a room with strangers.

“I just don’t want to feel, I just don’t want to eat. Back home I used to eat, but here, everything was new and you don’t have anyone and you just remember how you came in and again there is nothing different. She [psychologist] was trying, but you just move from another jail and from there to another jail” (Yohana, RP4).

“We were in a panic situation, we were in a hard situation plus everything around you is noisy and not relaxing. You feel nervous and you cannot concentrate” (Rasheed, RP12).

The DP system, combined with the uncertainty of the asylum process, had a significant negative impact on participants’ well-being (Higgins et al., 2019; Porter and Haslam, 2005; Ziersch and Due, 2018). In addition to struggling with poor mental health, participants frequently witnessed a deterioration in other residents’ mental health, which made the experience of the DP system feel even more tense, hopeless and unsafe.

To avoid the tension and hopelessness of life in DP, many participants reported trying to engage in meaningful activities outside of the DP centres. Participants described keeping busy by engaging in a wide variety of activities, including voluntary and paid work, enrolling in various educational courses and/or in English language classes and getting involved in arts and sports projects. For Nora and Yohana, keeping busy helped to alleviate stress and maintain positive mental health.

“All the time, doing stuff, I just wanted to get busy, not to stress myself. This was two years after I stayed home all day [laughs], after I was so, so sad and depressed when I got better I did all this” (Nora, RP14).

“I kept myself busy if I were not doing that, maybe, I wouldn’t be able to live, you know, healthy and be in the hostel” (Yohana, RP4).

⁴⁹ Several participants referred to life in DP as living in a prison. In line with findings from other studies that have examined refugees’ experience of living in the DP system in Ireland, e.g. O’Reilly 2018 or Higgins, Keogh, & Murphy 2018.

Keeping busy also provided residents with opportunities to leave the centre and locate themselves in spaces where they could connect to a life beyond the DP system. Yet, while keeping busy was considered to be important, this goal was sometimes hampered by the restrictions imposed on their engagement with education and employment. Mothers with young children and pregnant women described particular struggles in their efforts to engage in activities outside the DP centre. Chantal, for instance, had attended courses outside the DP centre but stopped when she became pregnant, which meant that she spent most of her time in the centre: *“I tried [to do some courses but by] the time my birth was coming – I stopped. So, I was just staying [in the centre] and it was crazy, it was hard”* (Chantal, RP20). Despite these barriers, most participants conveyed a determination to be and stay active, often as a means of maintaining psychological well-being and, thereby, resisting the negative impacts of the DP system. Frequently, participants experienced alternating phases of activity and inactivity; the latter characterised by boredom and/or withdrawal, depending on their mental well-being and the availability of opportunities for engagement. In short, engaging in meaningful activities outside of the centres was a practice developed by participants aimed at avoiding the oppressions imposed by the system of DP.

In contrast, some participants reported that they had actively challenged the system and its externally imposed authority by speaking up and asserting themselves in a variety of settings. Such challenges included advocating for transfers to other centres, as discussed earlier, or engaging in arguments with staff members. David, for example, threatened a receptionist with legal action during a particularly intense argument. While some participants reported engaging in arguments with staff members, others channelled their frustration with the system into advocating for an end to the system of DP. For example, a number of participants had given workshops, lectures or talks about DP and/or had given interviews to researchers and various media outlets about the living conditions in DP centres. Others had become involved in the Movement for Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI). Rafiq, for example, told that he was involved with a refugee organisation and had given several interviews to both the print and broadcast media detailing his experiences.

“I spoke to media, to Irish Times, I spoke to TV, the main programme, because it is a Prime Time at that time and the papers around in the community [...] I spoke about the circumstances [of living in DP]” (Rafiq, RP5)

For several participants, becoming and being an activist and speaking out about injustices was an integral part of their identity even before their arrival in Ireland, and in some cases, was also the reason why they had to flee their home countries. Nauman, for example, had campaigned on issues of gender equality in his home country and Abhik had been involved in student protests, resulting in both men having to flee their countries. As a result, to a considerable extent, speaking out about injustices experienced within DP came naturally to them. Being an activist can be understood as being part of these participants' habitus, the set of dispositions, attitudes, and values that guide individuals' actions and responses, and which is resistant to change (Bourdieu, 2000).

Overall, participants' accounts demonstrate that living in DP had a profound negative impact on their mental well-being (Higgins et al., 2019; Porter and Haslam, 2005; Ziersch and Due, 2018). In response to the pressures experienced within the DP system, participants developed a range of strategies in their efforts to avoid and/or resist the system. Bourdieu posits that agents and groups who are subordinated within a field are more likely to challenge the existing rules of a field (Bourdieu, 1977, p.169), an assertion which is evident in participants' attempts to resist the system. By asserting themselves in the presence of centre managers and staff and also through campaigning for change, participants actively sought to challenge the DP system. These findings support Lentin's (2015) observation that asylum seekers in Ireland are actively resisting the system of DP and "can no longer be theorised merely as Agamben's 'bare life', at the mercy of sovereign power" (p.23) but, rather, as active agents attempting to reclaim control over their lives.

5.8. Conclusion

Applying for international protection in Ireland – frequently a choice of last resort – went hand in hand with entering the Direct Provision System. This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of DP as a distinct field of housing (Bourdieu, 1977; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). The concurrent policy of dispersal, as well as the provision of overcrowded, low-quality, and segregated accommodation, dictated refugees' early housing experiences in Ireland and contributed to their spatial stigmatisation and othering (Kreichauf, 2018). While the dispersal system imposed a strict system of accommodation allocation, this research strongly suggests that a number of participants succeeded in forming vertical weak ties (Ryan et al., 2008) to "official people", who supported them in carving out more advantageous housing journeys by providing them with improved access to educational and employment opportunities as well as positive social networks. Consistent with the findings of previous research (Fanning and Veale,

2004; Fanning et al., 2001), the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that a combination of reduced welfare payments, benefits-in-kind provision and policies that led to asylum seekers' exclusion from the labour market, meant that a majority of participants lived with persistent poverty, in turn severely limiting their ability to acquire economic capital.

The field of DP, conceptualised as a relational space (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992), comprises the relations among centre residents as well as the relations between residents and centre staff/management. Living alongside each other in a superdiverse space (Vertovec, 2007) provided fertile ground for conflicts and tensions, also profoundly impacting participants' sense of safety (Hauge et al., 2017). Yet, living alongside each other, as neighbours, also provided access to a network of close and weak ties (Ryan et al., 2008), which offered access to information and practical support. Following Putnam (1993), the cooperation and coordination evident within the DP community can be understood as a form of social capital. In contrast, the relations between centre residents and centre staff/management were characterised by a system of hierarchical control, which operated through a discretionary system of rewards and punishments, experienced by participants as infantilising, inhumane and imperialistic.

The field of DP pervaded all aspects of participants' lives, with profound negative impacts on their well-being. Yet, as Bourdieu (2020) points out, agents and groups who are subordinated within a field are more likely to challenge this field (Bourdieu, 1977, p.169). This became evident in participants' attempts to avoid and/or resist the system. The following chapter examines participants' experiences of gaining status and searching for accommodation outside of DP.

6. Gaining Status and Searching for Housing

Having examined participants' experiences of DP, this chapter focuses on participants' experiences of the transition from asylum seeker to refugee. The chapter explores participants' experiences and learning as they navigated the newly encountered housing field. First, a detailed account of the meanings participants attached to gaining status is presented, including an analysis of the ways in which they mobilised social networks as they learned to navigate the transition to mainstream welfare provision. The second part of the chapter examines how participants acquired an understanding of the private rental market when searching for housing and also explores their experiences of housing exclusion, including experiences of discrimination. The final part of this chapter considers how participants adapted their housing search strategies as a means of overcoming their disadvantaged positions in the private rental market, also discussing the role of social networks in facilitating access to housing.

6.1. The Transition from Asylum Seeker to Refugee

Gaining status was a significant event in participants' lives⁵⁰, not least because it conferred certainty in relation to their positions by guaranteeing that they could remain in Ireland on a long-term basis. By declaring that the person has now become a recognised refugee, with corresponding rights and duties, Bourdieu et al. (1994) posit that "the State wields a genuinely creative, quasi-divine, power" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.12). The legal status of an asylum seeker is associated with limited rights and entitlements, as documented in the previous chapter, while gaining refugee status meant that this burden was finally lifted, as new opportunities to access economic, cultural and social capital became available.

At the time of gaining status, participants had waited for an outcome on their application for international protection for between three and 61 months. While participants who had arrived from countries of active military conflict, such as in Syria, participants from Ukraine or Libya had waited for a maximum of 18 months for a decision

⁵⁰ Participants were informed about the decision in two stages. Initially participants received a letter from the International Protection Office (IPO), which was established under the *International Protection Act 2015* which commenced on the 31st of December 2016 and replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC). IPO had responsibility for processing applications for international protection and advises the Minister for Justice whether to grant status. After participants received a first letter informing them about the IPO's recommendation, participants had to wait, at times for several months, for the Ministerial letter to arrive which confirms that they had been granted status. Only this second letter by the Minister allowed participants to register for an Irish residence permit, to access mainstream welfare supports and unrestricted employment.

on their status, while participants who had arrived from countries that are designated ‘safe countries’ under the *International Protection Act 2015*, had waited for between 30 and 59 months. A number of participants reported that the introduction of the new *International Protection Act 2015* on the 31st of December 2016 led to delays with the processing of their application because they had to repeat their ‘first’ interview after the introduction of the new Act.

Statuses granted to international protection applicants, as well as their corresponding rights, vary significantly across Europe (EMN European Migration Network, 2020). There are three possible outcomes for asylum seekers in Ireland: international protection, subsidiary protection or leave to remain⁵¹. While these three statuses provide equal access to social rights such as access to welfare and housing benefits, the right to family reunification and citizenship vary depending on the status granted⁵².

6.1.1. *Starting One’s Life*

Gaining status meant gaining the freedom to start one’s life, including having access to employment and education, the choice of where to settle and the certainty of long-term residency. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants therefore frequently framed the experience of gaining status as a critical turning point in their lives. Nasrin, for example, who arrived in Ireland in her early twenties, told that ‘*we became free*’ upon being granted status because she finally had the right to pursue further studies and to seek employment. For Rasheed, having the certainty that he can remain in Ireland meant that he now had the right to apply for family reunification for his wife and three children.

“If you get the ID you can start your life, you can look for a job, you can move and you know you will live here, they will not deport you” (Rasheed, RP12).

Many participants linked gaining status to becoming free and, therefore, felt a sense of strong relief about finally gaining status. Busiswe, for instance, who characterised life in DP as a constant state of crisis and survival, described her relief upon learning that she had gained status.

⁵¹ Seventeen participants received international protection, three participants received subsidiary protection and two participants received leave to remain.

⁵² The impact of differing rights to family reunification is examined in Chapter 8.

“I felt like a human being again. [...] You know if you are in this crisis, in this survival mode, you don’t know what life is. So that day, whew, huge relief for my shoulders” (Busiswe, RP19).

Having waited for the status decision for lengthy periods – very often, for many years – receiving the decision was a highly emotional moment. Significantly, positive emotions, such as relief and happiness about their newly acquired certainty and freedom, were closely linked to feelings of sadness and regret about what has been lost during the time spent waiting for a decision. This mix of emotions, consisting of relief and sadness, was also expressed by Abhik. During a Go-Along through a park located in Dublin’s city centre, Abhik shared his reflections on ‘gaining status’ (see Case Study 1), explaining that when the ministerial letter granting status finally arrived, he and his family felt overwhelmed with feelings of happiness but, also, exhaustion.

Case Study 1 Go-Along with Abhik

During the Go-Along, Abhik stopped at the very spot where his family sat down the day they had received the ministerial letter granting them status. Abhik remembered how, leading up to this moment, he had checked the mail every day, for eight months, hoping that this would be the day his family was granted status. This period of waiting felt particularly difficult for Abhik as DP increasingly started to feel like a prison to him, leaving him longing for a ‘normal’ life: *“It was no longer Direct Provision for us, it was like a prison. I felt we could be out of this and live like a normal human being”*. When that letter finally arrived, he and his family felt overwhelmed by feelings of happiness and relief as feelings of exhaustion simultaneously set in.

“The waiting was just too long. That feeling of being so tired, of being waiting. And the tension and then the stress starts really to sink through our mind, instead of being so happy with joy we are just so tired. It was a sense of relief, but I think by that time we even forgot how to laugh.”

Standing on the patch of grass where he sat that day, Abhik recalled how the letter also prompted him to reflect on his family’s experience of displacement, including life spent in DP and how he felt a strong sense of remorse: *“I do partly blame myself for what they [family] have been through in their life, because of the choice I have made in my past”*. Now that the family had gained status, Abhik felt a strong sense of responsibility that, as a father and husband, he had to make amends for the hardship they had

suffered: *“I just had that feeling like, this is the time, I will do whatever I have to do to turn that situation for good”*.

Abhik’s account shows that he experienced gaining status as a critical moment, that evoked feelings of relief and exhaustion, but also prompted a moment of reflection on the hardships his family experienced while living in DP. Reflecting on the adversities his family had endured, he was determined to seize this moment and improve his family’s quality of life.

This sense of exhaustion and regret about the time lost, which is strongly apparent in Abhik’s account, was a recurring theme in the participants’ narratives. In addition to the range of emotions generated by gaining status, the prospect of leaving the familiar environment of DP brought its own stressors, which were particularly evident in the accounts of single mothers with young children. Due to their caring responsibilities, these mothers had spent most of their time in the DP centre where they resided, which meant that they had far fewer opportunities for interaction with the outside world, also making them more reliant on the emotional and practical support provided within the DP community. Rose, who had her first and second child while living in DP, explained how other DP residents provided her with critical supports in her efforts to deal with everyday struggles. For this reason, the thought of leaving this familiar environment behind saddened her.

“Even if things were not great, we shared our experiences and that was also some sort of strength, yeah, but now, thinking like, that I am going to go now and look for a house, somewhere I don’t know and not having that sort of environment again, it was saddening for me at first” (Rose, RP21).

In a similar vein, Grace, who had spent most of her time since arriving in Ireland in a DP centre in a rural area, felt apprehensive about what awaited her outside of DP, as this was the only environment she was familiar with and which also offered some protection from the outside world.

“So, I got it [status] and then, now, I was scared, again, because of like, so what am I going to do now? What’s next? Because I was still so protected when I was in Direct Provision” (Grace, RP16).

The accounts of Rose and Grace show that despite the difficulties life in DP presented, DP also offered a sense of community and protection from having to manage independently, which meant that the prospect of leaving this familiar environment behind prompted feelings of apprehension.

Overall, gaining status represented a critical moment in participants' lives as it brought to an end what O'Reilly (2018) terms a period of 'ontological liminality'. Participants' experiences of marginalisation and an absence of control over their future had seemingly come to an end. Participants therefore associated gaining status as finally having the freedom to start their lives in Ireland. This moment was accompanied by a mix of emotions: on the one hand, relief about gaining a sense certainty, leaving life in DP behind and having full social rights and access to the labour market; on the other, feelings of exhaustion arising from having had to cope with the insecurity of the asylum process and living in DP for a prolonged period, as well as anxieties arising from a fear of losing the sense of community and belonging that they had established with other DP residents. Boccagni (2017) defines familiarity as a key attribute of a home, "in an emotional sense, pointing to intimacy and comfort, and in a cognitive one, standing for orientation in space, stability, routine, continuity or even permanence" (Boccagni, 2017, p.7). The findings presented here indicate that while DP did not offer participants a sense of security or control, it did offer some, particularly single mothers, a familiar environment. Gaining status, therefore, also meant preparing to leave this familiar environment behind.

6.1.2. Navigating a New Bureaucratic Field

Having discussed the meanings participants attached to gaining status, this subsection examines how participants experienced the administrative processes associated with the transition from asylum seeker to refugee. Upon gaining status, the rights and entitlements of refugees change fundamentally and require people to navigate a new set of bureaucratic rules and procedures (Obeid, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). In Ireland, welfare and housing provided to asylum seekers are underpinned by legislation and bureaucratic processes that differ significantly from mainstream welfare provision. This means that once asylum seekers gain status they have to learn to acquire the necessary cultural capital to navigate this new bureaucratic field (Bourdieu et al., 1994).

The vast majority of participants had applied for some form of welfare⁵³ and/or housing support⁵⁴ payment once they gained status. Until the year 2015, a key feature of this bureaucratic process was that proof of address was required in order to access welfare payments, which could only be obtained once accommodation outside of DP was secured. Without access to welfare payments, participants struggled to find accommodation and, without accommodation that would provide them with proof of address, refugees were not permitted to register for welfare support. Five of the participants who had gained status before 2015 experienced this bureaucratic process. Aleksander, who had arrived in Ireland in 2014 and who gained status within three months of applying for international protection, struggled to find accommodation because he was only allowed to register for social welfare once he managed to secure accommodation, leaving him in what he described as a 'catch-22' situation.

"Finding a place to live was not easy at all. Because every landlord wanted a deposit in advance, but I didn't have that money. [...] to have social welfare you have to have an address. To have an address you have to sign an agreement with the landlord. To sign the agreement you have to have money. Like deposit and first month's rent. It was catch-22" (Aleksander, RP6).

This 'catch-22' situation was also highlighted by Ní Raghallaigh et al. (2016) in their analysis of the issues faced by refugees when transitioning from DP to housing. The roll out of the HAP to refugees who have gained status, as well as the Department of Social Protection covering rent deposits through Exceptional Needs Payments, seem to have eased some of these pressures. Since 2015, people who gain status must register for the Irish Residence Permit⁵⁵ (IRP) while living in DP and, once participants receive this permit, they can apply for welfare and housing supports⁵⁶.

⁵³ There is a range of welfare supports available depending on the individual situation. Participants applied to receive the following payments: Jobseeker's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Child Benefit, One-Parent Family Payment, Back to Education Allowance, VTOS scheme and SUSI.

⁵⁴ At the time of interview all participants who received housing supports were in receipt of the housing assistance payment (HAP), the participants who transitioned before 2015 were recipients of rent supplements or the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

⁵⁵ Up to the 11th of December 2017 the Irish Residence Permit was called GNIB card.

⁵⁶ While participants who gained status after February 2015 were able to apply for welfare payments while still living in DP, these new payments only came into effect once participants had moved out of DP. The Government stated that an earlier increase was not necessary as costs for accommodation continued to be covered through the DP system. The only payment that became available to some participants immediately after gaining status was the Child Benefit payment. While participants initially did not receive full welfare payments, being registered for the payments

This change in policy effectively ended the ‘catch-22’ situation for refugees transitioning from DP to housing. Yet, despite this change, a majority of participants commented on how difficult it was to navigate this new bureaucratic system. A common thread running through participants’ accounts was the importance of social networks in navigating the transition: most reported receiving practical support or advice when applying for welfare payments, which they accessed either through links to organisations such as local migrant and refugee support organisations⁵⁷, Citizens Information offices, or one of the two housing organisations that were tasked by the Irish Government to provide transition supports⁵⁸. Simultaneously, some received support from friends or acquaintances who had previously gained status and who were able to share their knowledge about this new bureaucratic field.

Support with navigating the system became even more important during the Covid-19 pandemic when office closures due to lockdowns created additional barriers. Abeni faced difficulties registering for the required residence permit to apply for welfare and housing support. It was only with the assistance and ‘magic hands’ of a support worker from a local NGO that Abeni successfully managed to sign up for welfare and housing support during this period.

“I got my residency during the pandemic period and getting an appointment for GNIB was an issue, so she [support worker] also assisted me in applying for housing which I was not able to get done before getting my GNIB, but she has magic hands, she did it anyways, and we got approved” (Abeni, RP17).

While Abeni, in the end, succeeded in signing up for the payments, this process took significant time and the intervention of an experienced NGO support worker. Even before the onset of the pandemic, the administrative burden for participants associated with having to transition from one bureaucratic process to another was considerable.

was still important: the length of time that they had been registered for the Job Seekers allowance counted, for example, towards the eligibility for the Back to Education allowance. Being registered also meant that once accommodation was secured, notification of the change of address was sufficient for the allowance to increase.

⁵⁷ Refugee and migrant organisations have provided transition supports to refugees since the introduction of DP by providing information on the bureaucratic system and in advocating on their behalf. Most of these organisations have limited geographical reach and participants often reported getting to know about available supports through word of mouth.

⁵⁸ In 2019, the Government tasked two organisations, the Peter McVerry Trust and Depaul Housing, to support refugees during their transition from DP to housing, which included support in registering for welfare and HAP.

Nabil had had gathered all available information on this new bureaucratic process from the *Citizens Information* website well in advance of receiving status. Despite being well informed about the administrative process, the family found itself in a situation of administrative limbo: Nabil's wife gave birth to a baby after the recommendation of the International Protection Office (IPO) was issued, but before the Ministerial decision to grant status was made, leaving their child in administrative limbo.⁵⁹ As a result, Nabil had to dedicate a significant amount of time and enlist support from an NGO worker to understand and navigate this bureaucratic process.

"We went to the IPO and the IPO said, no, your file is closed from us, we went to immigration, and they said, no, you have to go to IPO. Then after many times, go here and there, here and there, I went to the [refugee organisation], there is one lady, [solicitor's name], she supported me" (Nabil, RP8).

While the advice of support workers was frequently said to be helpful – and often critical – to learning to navigate various bureaucratic processes, this support was not always available and there were instances when participants received incorrect information. Mohammad, for instance, who had arrived through the Greece Relocation scheme, felt frustrated when he received inaccurate information about the amount of support he was eligible for, suggesting that even support workers at times struggled to provide adequate information about the process.

"I heard from the social welfare employee in [DP Centre] that I am entitled to get my job seeker payment until I get work, two hundred a week. But I used to get only one hundred,⁶⁰ [...] They [support workers] weren't sure about some information, so that's why it made me kind of frustrated" (Mohammad, RP11).

⁵⁹ The newborn baby was not included in the application reviewed by the International Protection Office. This meant that the office's recommendation to the Minister of Justice for status did not include the baby. While Nabil informed the International Protection Office as well as the Department for Justice of the new family member as soon as the baby was born, neither office felt responsible in this case. Nabil sought legal advice from a refugee organisation and in the end the family had to submit a separate application for international protection for the baby. This meant that while the family was granted status the new born baby still had the status of an international protection applicant.

⁶⁰ This corresponds to the Jobseeker's Allowance for people Aged 18-24 who do not live independently.

Faiza and her brother, on the other hand, who did not live in DP during the asylum process, but in a range of temporary housing situations,⁶¹ faced additional barriers when seeking access to welfare. While Faiza entered the labour market and was no longer eligible for social benefits, her brother initially did not find employment. Despite being unemployed, it took him two months to convince welfare officers of his eligibility for welfare support. Faiza felt strongly that if they have lived in DP, they would have had more supports available and experienced fewer barriers to accessing welfare.

“They said [to Faiza’s brother] you survived the last nine months, you have support, then you can survive without jobseekers allowance until you get a job.” (Faiza, RP18).

The accounts by Abeni, Nabil, Mohammad and Faiza demonstrate that navigating a new bureaucratic field was time-intensive and that the change from one bureaucratic process to another created a significant administrative burden for participants. While navigating the new system at times required the ‘magic hands’ of support workers, the accounts of Mohammad and Faiza suggest that there were situations in which access to adequate support was not always in place or was delayed. It is important to note that while the administrative burden to register for social benefits was significant, it did not lead to the non-take-up of social benefits among participants.⁶²

Participants’ narratives of transitioning from the welfare system of DP to the mainstream welfare system illustrate the challenges of adapting to a new bureaucratic field with its distinct processes. These findings echo Strang et al.’s (2018) observation that a lack of understanding of these new administrative processes can lead to delays in accessing welfare. Yet, the findings outlined in this section also show that participants drew on a wide range of social networks, including NGO support workers, friends and acquaintances, in their efforts to navigate the new bureaucratic system. These social networks proved essential to participants’ ability to acquire field-specific knowledge, which can be regarded

⁶¹ Faiza was working as a live-in au pair which provided her with a small salary and a place to stay during the asylum process whereas her brother stayed with his girlfriend. Both lived in the same Irish city before moving to Dublin once they gained status.

⁶² Two participants decided against applying for welfare benefits. Nauman emphasised the significance of earning a living independently, stressing that *“I don’t want to be a burden on the Irish economy”*. The non-take-up of social benefits can be understood here as an active distancing from the prevailing public perception of refugees as a burden. Yonas, on the other hand, associated accessing welfare with the loss of control over his life: *“I don’t want to be asked what I’m doing, I don’t want that kind of control. I want to be free”*. Thus, for Yonas, not taking up social benefits was his way of retaining his newly-won freedom. While at the time of interview Yonas and Nauman were both working full-time, both experienced periods of unemployment during which they might have been eligible for welfare payments.

as a form of administrative or navigational cultural capital (Masood and Azfar Nisar, 2020; Yosso, 2005).

6.2. The Lived Experiences of Housing Exclusion

Having discussed the emotional and administrative processes associated with gaining status, this section explores participants' experiences of searching for housing in the context of persistent housing exclusion and experiences of discrimination. Persistent labour market exclusion, combined with low availability of affordable accommodation, means that refugees in most European countries struggle to access adequate housing (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Netto, 2011a; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). Similarly, in Ireland, refugees' experience of the asylum process, characterised by labour market exclusion and welfare provision as benefits-in-kind (see Chapter Five), meant that refugees had limited economic capital at the point of gaining status, leaving them highly disadvantaged in the context of securing private rented accommodation. A combination of limited housing stock, low affordability and housing market discrimination negatively impacts the housing options of low-income households, including refugees, in Ireland (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018; Grotti et al., 2018; Gusciute et al., 2022; Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Long waiting lists restrict their access to social housing and inadequate income and lack of savings means that home ownership is out of reach (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018). As a result, low-income households rely heavily on the private rented sector for accommodation, a market characterised by rapidly rising rents and strong competition for tenancies (Byrne and Norris, 2018). This section examines participants' experiences in the private rental market, focusing on their understanding of the market and their encounters with discrimination, especially as recipients of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), or related to their race and unemployment status.

6.2.1. Developing an Understanding of the Private Rental Market

Developing a good understanding of the housing market is essential when refugees search for housing (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Boterman, 2012; Hochstenbach and Boterman, 2015; Murdie, 2002; Van Kempen and Özüekren, 1998; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023). For this study's participants, gaining status meant that, for the first time since arriving in Ireland, they confronted the realities of the Irish housing sector. Gaining an understanding of the reality of the Irish private rental market and knowing how to navigate this reality constituted a critical first step to finding accommodation.

Successfully navigating the housing search in the private rental market demands a comprehensive set of skills, including proficiency in the use of online platforms to search for available housing and to arrange viewings, an understanding of the necessary documentation required for tenancy applications, and the ability to effectively communicate with prospective landlords or letting agencies when seeking accommodation. Participants' accounts indicate that they drew on three distinct strategies in their efforts to acquire a deeper understanding of the Irish private rental market: 1) learning from the experience of other DP residents; 2) engaging in self-directed learning; and 3) seeking advice from support organisations. A majority of participants used a combination of these three strategies, as Yonas' case demonstrates.

Case Study 2 Yonas, Learning about the Housing Market

From the moment Yonas gained status he was in regular contact with transition support workers, who explained the challenges associated with finding housing in the Dublin region. Yonas had also listened attentively to other DP residents, who recounted their experiences of searching for accommodation. Additionally, he had watched a TV documentary about the housing crisis in Ireland to inform himself about the housing market. These different sources of information helped Yonas to gain an understanding of the housing sector and to re-adjust his expectations. Confronted with the challenging reality of the housing market, he stressed the need to persevere with the search for housing: "*You don't accept [the housing crisis], you [keep] looking for housing*". To escape life in DP, Yonas eventually started to couch surf in his friend's house share while still searching for accommodation. He continued to couch surf for two months until he was offered a room in his friend's rental property on a long-term basis.

Learning about the housing sector from various sources, as illustrated in Yonas' case, was essential to acquiring an understanding of the private rental market. However, this knowledge truly came to life when participants actively engaged in the search for housing and experienced the realities of the housing crisis first-hand. For example, even though Abhik was well-informed about the private rental market when he started searching for accommodation, he was taken aback by how few of the rental listings fell within the budget available to him.

“I was in a different world, I just realised how difficult it is to find accommodation within that limit [...] and I saw how crazy the rental market was in Dublin” (Abhik, RP9).

In response, participants further developed their housing search practices. For example, participants in households with more than two children frequently explained that they had initially searched for a three-bedroom house, anticipating that some of their children would share a bedroom. However, they soon learned that estate agencies and landlords preferred renting such properties to smaller families. Rafiq, for instance, who had three children, was repeatedly told that the houses he sought to rent were too small for his family, prompting him to expand his search to four-bedroom properties.

“Landlords are looking for smaller families, in two- or three-bedroom houses, they say, we give it to a small family” (Rafiq, RP5).

In contrast, participants who did not have children learned that not having children was advantageous when seeking private rented housing and that it significantly bolstered their chances of securing a tenancy.

As Rafiq’s example shows, by providing a reason for not accepting a tenancy, landlords can support households in acquiring an understanding of the private rental market, allowing them to develop their housing search practices accordingly. Yet, the vast majority of this study’s participants experienced housing exclusion as silence in that many of their attempts to contact landlords remained unanswered. On the rare occasions when participants were invited to view a rental property, it was common for them not to receive a response after the viewing. This silence on the part of landlords made it difficult for participants to understand why landlords were seemingly unwilling to rent to them. Nabil, for example, who was looking for accommodation for himself, his wife and his four young children in early 2020, had not received a single response to the countless emails he had sent to landlords and estate agents since he gained status, leaving him wondering what criteria they were applying when choosing tenants. Yohana, on the other hand, had attended more than 20 rental property viewings in her search for a studio apartment but had not received a single response from a landlord or letting agent.

“I don’t know what was the reason, I don’t know what the criteria is for them” (Nabil, RP8).

“They don’t reply to you, why? They will tell you they will come back to you but they will not” (Yohana, RP4).

Experiencing housing exclusion as silence meant that participants struggled to acquire a better understanding of the private rental market, leaving them wondering about the reasons why they were not able to secure a tenancy.

In brief, self-directed learning and information obtained from other DP residents and a range of NGOs supported participants in acquiring an understanding of the Irish private rental market. This knowledge can be understood as a form of navigational cultural capital, which allowed participants to adapt their housing search practices accordingly (Yosso, 2005). The importance of gaining first-hand experience in refining this knowledge by actively searching for housing echoes Murdie’s (2002) observation that developing an understanding of the private rental market requires significant time. Yet, the lack of response on the part of the landlords and estate agencies meant that participants frequently experienced housing exclusion as silence. This lack of communication amplified participants’ sense of exclusion from the private rented market and also thwarted their ability to build a better understanding of the housing field (Rudert et al., 2017).

6.2.2. Experiences of Discrimination

Research conducted in countries such as Canada, Austria and Germany has consistently demonstrated that refugees frequently experience discrimination from landlords based on their refugee status, religion, family size, not knowing the local language, unemployment and/or ethnicity (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007). This section examines the most common forms of discrimination experienced by participants during their housing search in the private rental market, covering discrimination based on being a recipient of housing assistance payments, the status of unemployment, and race.

Evidence from Europe and Canada has shown that landlords are less likely to accept tenants who are in receipt of a housing subsidy (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Hearne and Murphy, 2017; Sherrell et al., 2007). All 19 participants who were in receipt of HAP reported that the payment acted as a barrier to successfully securing accommodation. Housing exclusion based on HAP was openly practised by landlords, according to a large number, despite being prohibited in Irish law. David, for example, had encountered landlords who openly admitted to not accepting

HAP beneficiaries as tenants, while Abeni had observed that as soon as prospective landlords learned that she was a HAP recipient, they informed her that the property was no longer available.

“It is very difficult to find a place when you are under HAP. It is not easy because most landlords actually said it to my face, ‘Oh no, sorry, we don’t take HAP’. And they are not allowed to do that, you know” (David, RP15).

“Most landlords once they hear that you are on HAP, on social welfare, they just tell you, ‘Oh sorry, it’s gone’ or something like that” (Abeni, RP17).

The fact that some landlords and estate agents openly admitted to not accepting tenants who received HAP suggests that they felt less of a need to hide this specific form of discrimination. With discrimination on the grounds of HAP payments experienced so commonly, participants sometimes speculated on the reasons for this reluctance on the part of landlords to accept HAP recipients as tenants, often attributing their negative experiences to the bureaucracy associated with HAP tenancies.⁶³ Abhik, for example, suggested that landlords might not be familiar with the bureaucratic process of having a tenant in receipt of HAP: *“Maybe they are not quite sure how the paper works”* (Abhik, RP9). Rose and Abeni, on the other hand, felt that landlords had a strong preference for tenants who were employed and who paid ‘cash in hand’ to avoid the administrative burden that comes with having a HAP tenant.

“If they have to pick someone here [at a viewing], would they [landlord] pick someone who has to see the house and go back to the hostel and ask for details and social [welfare] and all this or would they just get someone straight forward who is working and is doing their own things?” (Rose, RP21).

“If I was working that would have given me a better chance of getting a house because most landlords want to deal with you giving them cash in hand than going to the Government” (Abeni, RP17).

⁶³ Landlords renting to a tenant on HAP are required to submit forms to the relevant local authority providing detailed information on the property, including whether it is compliant with the legal standards for rental accommodation. This process also requires landlords to be tax compliant.

These accounts demonstrate that participants often attributed housing exclusion based on HAP to the bureaucratic processes of the HAP system rather than to individual discriminatory practices on the part of the landlords.

Employment was a valuable currency when seeking accommodation in the private rental market, it not only bolstered participants financial situation; being employed also constituted a form of symbolic capital that signified to landlords that prospective tenants were managing their lives independently. Busiswe, who took up employment after the right to work was introduced in summer 2018, felt that her labour market participation was an advantage when seeking housing, even if she remained dependent on HAP and Jobseekers Allowance. Having observed that employment conferred advantages in the search for housing, Abhik prioritised finding employment over searching for accommodation in order to improve his position in the housing market.

“What would have been my advantage is because I am employed [...] the fact that I am working, it added something to my application because the landlord knows that I am working” (Busiswe, RP19).

“If you have a job, it makes it easier to find accommodation with the payslips, even if only for a few months, you know. So my plan was to look for a job first and then within a few months look for accommodation” (Abhik, RP9).

Of the 22 participants, only four were in employment at the time they gained status and a small number starting to work after gaining status. Those who were employed engaged either in part-time work and/or low-paid employment, which meant that they continued to be eligible for HAP. Being employed and in a position to demonstrate this by providing landlords with pay slips, was viewed as advantageous when seeking housing, even in situations where participants remained in a precarious financial position and continued to receive HAP. This suggests that employment was valued beyond providing vital income and was considered to serve as a form of symbolic currency in the context of navigating the housing market.

Racial discrimination in the Irish private rental market, as discussed in Chapter Two, has been well documented in Ireland and elsewhere and negatively impacts the search for housing among ethnic minorities (Finn and Mayock, 2022; Grotti et al., 2018; Gusciute et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2006). Despite this evidence, only one-third of this study’s participants reported experiences of racism when searching for housing. One

possible explanation for the relatively small number who reported racialised discrimination – particularly in contrast to the far more widespread reports of discrimination based on HAP – could be that landlords feel the need to mask their negative attitude towards non-White applicants (McGinnity, Creighton, et al., 2020). Yohana and Faiza, for example, had not met with an explicit experience or expression of racism when searching for housing but both felt that racism could be a possible explanation for why they continued to receive negative responses from landlords. While Yohana was unsure whether racism or her employment status hindered her housing search, Faiza, a young Muslim woman who wore a headscarf (hijab), and who had a stable job, financial means, and good references, felt that racism was the only remaining explanation for her continued rejection by landlords.

“They will say, ‘Give us your references and all that. I will give them [the references] but they will not give me [the accommodation]. Maybe I am a different colour, I don’t know. Maybe it is because I am not working” (Yohana, RP4).

“They don’t have an excuse to refuse you, you’re not on HAP, you’re not asking for government support. I think some people are racist, they would prefer their own people” (Faiza, RP18).

While some elements of discrimination were not easily identifiable, a number of participants experienced more overt instances of racialised discrimination. David and Peter both had names that were common in Ireland and they both had an excellent command of English, which meant that landlords may have not been able to tell from their email messages that they were, in fact, Black men. David observed how the body language of landlords and estate agents changed upon encountering a Black, non-Irish tenant. Similarly, Peter had received invitations to viewings but, once the viewing took place, received no further communication, leaving him wondering whether landlords expected a white Irish person to attend the viewings.

“[I never experienced racism] to my face, but at viewings. In the applications, in the emails, they can’t really know, and then you go there, you see, you know the body language and all of that but I don’t like to read too much into that” (David, RP15).

“Because my name is [Peter], so if I just write [Peter], some people show interest and they would respond. But when I mention HAP and I am not Irish, you see, ‘Let me confirm with the landlord’. And that’s it” (Peter, RP22).

All participants who reported racialised discrimination in their search for housing were either Black and/or Muslim, while Kurdish and white European participants did not report experiences of discrimination. Peter and David both reported additional issues that negatively impacted their ability to secure housing. Peter felt strongly that it was more difficult to secure accommodation, particularly shared accommodation, as a male and explained that he knew several African men who had experienced homelessness as a result of their exclusion from housing opportunities. David, on the other hand, experienced discrimination based on his youth when he was told by a landlady that the apartment was more suited to older tenants who were less likely to host social gatherings and parties. Peter and David were the only two participants who reported discrimination based on gender and/or age.

As documented, participants experienced multiple intersecting forms of housing market discrimination. Particularly evident were experiences of discrimination based on race, their status as HAP recipients and/or unemployed, which in turn led to protracted periods of housing exclusion (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007). Interestingly, participants experienced some forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on HAP and unemployment, more openly than discrimination based on race. Research in Ireland into attitudes towards minority groups has found that highly educated individuals, in particular, feel more of a need to conceal negative attitudes towards minority groups, a practice which has been attributed to a social desirability bias (McGinnity, Creighton, et al., 2020). The narratives presented in this section reveal that participants, at times, struggled to pinpoint the precise source of discrimination, drawing attention to the fact that systemic processes of discrimination are often “slippery in that they can be difficult to precisely evidence and challenge” (Lukes et al., 2019, p.3201).

6.3. Adapting Housing Search Practice

Having examined participants’ experiences of developing an understanding of the private rental market and their disadvantaged position within this housing field, this third part of the chapter explores how participants adapted their housing search practices in their attempts to overcome the enduring challenges they faced. Refugees’ housing search practices, including their interactions with landlords, play a central role in understanding refugees’ access to housing (Aigner, 2019). This section examines four distinct practices and strategies which were identified from a detailed analysis of their accounts: 1) concealing a part or parts of one’s identity perceived as likely to be discriminated against;

2) attempting to convince landlords of their desirability as tenants; 3) revising their housing expectations downward; and 4) drawing on social networks to find housing.

6.3.1. *Concealing (Parts of) Oneself*

Ongoing experiences of discrimination in the housing market prompted a significant number of participants to not disclose that they were HAP recipients or, alternatively, to conceal parts of their identity from landlords and letting agents. Peter, for instance, explained that he did not always state that he was in receipt of HAP because he felt that non-disclosure would bolster his chances of getting invited to a viewing. Faiza, on the other hand, concealed her identity as a Muslim woman when she attended some viewings by replacing her headscarf with a hat because she feared discrimination based on her religious beliefs. Thus, a considerable number viewed concealing aspects of their economic situation or identity as a practice that could improve their chances of securing housing in the private rental market.

“Sometimes I find it necessary to withhold some information [being on HAP and not being Irish] because you never know. I’m just taking my chances. Somebody may think I am trying. Give you a chance” (Peter, RP22).

“Sometimes I had to wear like a hat and remove my headscarf because maybe they were like racist that they wouldn’t accept Muslims” (Faiza, RP18).

In addition to omitting and/or concealing certain information, a small number had also enlisted the help of white Irish or European friends when contacting landlords in the hope that the comparatively better position of these individuals in the private rental market might boost their prospects of finding accommodation. Rose, who spoke with an accent that easily identified her as being of African origin, had repeatedly been told that properties were already let when she made enquires; however, when her French friend called the same landlord, she was informed that the property was still available. Likewise, Grace had been advised that enlisting the help of an Irish friend when contacting landlords would improve her chances of finding accommodation and, while Grace was open to doing so, she did not have such a friend.

“My friend, because she is French, but she is more Irish because she has lived here most of her life and she works here, so she rung for me, the same house and, for her, they said, ‘It’s there’. For me, they said, ‘It’s gone’” (Rose RP21).

“There are people who are given advice like, maybe get someone, an Irish person, to apply for you and then when you go for the viewing, then after you get the house, they say, ‘Ok, I was doing it for this person” (Grace, RP16).

Thus, concealing dimensions of one’s economic situation or identity by omitting information was a common practice used by participants in an attempt to overcome their disadvantaged positions in the rental market. The practice of concealing the receipt of state support was also observed by McKee et al. (2020) in their research into the housing experiences of low-income tenants in the UK, where the authors found that tenants were concealing information to conform to landlords’ image of what constitutes a ‘good tenant’. Enlisting the help of a friend who was in a more advantageous position by virtue of their white ethnicity to negotiate with landlords was identified by participants as an important resource when searching for housing, and can be understood as a form of bridging capital (Ager and Strang, 2008).

6.3.2. *Persuading Landlords of Being a ‘Good’ Tenant*

Occupying a disadvantaged position in a highly competitive private rental market meant that when participants applied for accommodation, they found that there was almost always another person who was deemed more deserving or more suitable for the tenancy. This prompted participants to develop a variety of interpersonal strategies in an attempt to counter the negative stereotypes and/or biases they suspected landlords held against them as ‘refugees’, ‘not Irish’ or ‘poor’. Personal encounters were considered to be central to persuading prospective landlords that they were good and ‘worthy’ tenants, particularly among participants who did not have reference letters from a previous landlord or from an employer.⁶⁴ Peter who lived in homelessness emergency accommodation at the time of the interview, and was trying to secure accommodation, suspected that landlords may believe “*that people from different countries, that are not Irish, do not keep their houses as good or as clean as an Irish person would*” (Peter, RP22). He therefore felt that personal encounters were important to counteracting prevailing biases and to potentially convincing a landlord of his credentials as a ‘good’ and reliable tenant.

⁶⁴ Landlord references represent an institutionalised form of certifying that a person is a reliable tenant. While participants who transitioned before 2015 reported not having reference letters as a major barrier, the situation slightly improved for participants who transitioned in later years when some DP managers started providing such letters. In addition, the introduction of the right to work meant that some of the participants had employment references to support their applications for accommodation.

“I would prefer to speak to the owner of the house and tell him or her that he or she should not have bias, stereotyping everything and everyone. Try and convince them that I will take care of their house. I think that’s the main worry. Trying to convince them that I don’t smoke, I am not an alcoholic, and I am well-behaved” (Peter, RP22).

While several participants identified persuading the landlord of their worthiness as a strategy that could enhance their chances of securing accommodation in the private rented sector, most also stressed that it was difficult to arrange such one-to-one meetings: being invited to a viewing was itself a challenge and landlords were not, in any case, always present at viewings. Chantal felt strongly that estate agents, who frequently had streamlined application processes in place, made it particularly difficult to use this practice of persuasion and much preferred to deal with private landlords directly.⁶⁵

“It was easier for me to deal with landlords directly. Oooh, the agencies, the agencies they are destroying [people seeking housing], they make it harder” (Chantal, RP20).

Several participants felt that personal encounters in which they had an opportunity to persuade the landlord of their deservingness were, at times, a decisive factor in securing a tenancy. While some were able to arrange these personal meetings themselves by searching properties through the website daft.ie, others like Abeni received support with arranging such meetings from a housing support officer in a refugee organisation. The housing officer persuaded a landlord to arrange a one-to-one viewing with Abeni, who took this opportunity to present herself as a competent mother who was familiar with the neighbourhood. Abeni strongly felt that *“talking to them [landlords] physically did the magic”* and that this personal encounter was integral to securing the tenancy.

Persuading landlords of one’s deservingness emerged as a widespread practice that participants mobilised in their efforts to counteract discrimination, negative biases and stereotypes. While the practice did lead some to successfully secure a tenancy, this practice also required participants to share very personal information with a person (landlord) who was essentially a stranger. In this sense, they had to enter into a very unequal power dynamic in their efforts to secure housing. Chantal explained the

⁶⁵ While Chantal and Abeni identified estate agencies as a barrier to having personal encounters with landlords, for a small number of participants, Grace, Rafiq, Faiza and Aleksander, letting agents were key in securing accommodation. In each case they were introduced to the agent by a third party, either a housing officer, a friend, or a landlord.

humiliating nature of her encounters with landlords, which led her to feel like she was “begging”.

“It’s hard to have housing in Ireland, it is very hard. It’s like, sometimes when you are doing this [persuading the landlord], you are begging” (Chantal, RP20).

All participants who employed the strategy of attempting to persuade a landlord(s) of their deservingness had a sufficient level of English to express themselves. Unsurprisingly, this strategy was not an option for participants who did not have English language proficiency unless they were able to enlist someone to speak on their behalf. This is consistent with research conducted in Canada, the UK and Germany, which has shown that knowing the local language is critical to accessing housing (Adam et al., 2019; Obeid, 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007).

To summarise, participants used the practice of persuading landlords of their worthiness in response to their disadvantaged position in the private rental market. These attempts to persuade the landlords can be seen as counternarratives within the context of confronting and negotiating housing market discrimination. This echoes the findings of St. Arnault and Merali (2019b) who, in their study of refugees' housing pathways out of homelessness, emphasised the importance of self-advocacy and convincing landlords of their deservingness as essential factors in securing housing. However, the act of persuading landlords necessitates personal encounters, and the implementation of streamlined processes for tenant screening can serve as a barrier to this practice. As McKee et al.'s (2020) have observed, “profiling, screening and discrimination are interwoven” (p. 1481). Lastly, this section has also drawn attention to the fact that social links to NGOs (Ager and Strang, 2008) played a significant enabling role by creating opportunities for personal encounters between participants and landlords.

6.3.3. Adapting and Lowering Expectations

As the duration of participants' search for accommodation extended – often for many months or even years⁶⁶ – awareness of their disadvantaged position in the private rental

⁶⁶ While 15 of the 22 participants moved out of DP within six months of gaining status, Chapter Six will show that the search for housing often continued after this initial move, either because participants moved into temporary or unsuitable housing situations and attempted to improve their housing situation, or because they received a notice of termination for their tenancy due to the sale of the property they were renting at a later stage of their housing journey, prompting a new period of searching for housing.

market deepened, prompting many to revise and adapt their housing expectations. This section discusses three adjustments reported by participants, which included paying more rent than planned; extending the geographical spread of the housing search; and accepting lower-quality accommodation. The longer participants searched for housing and the more urgent their need for accommodation became, the more likely they were to employ a combination of these strategies.

One of the strategies employed by participants in response to a highly competitive rental market was paying rental top-ups and negotiating HAP limits. Participants who received HAP were tasked with securing housing within certain rental limits. However, the lack of affordable housing meant that a majority opted to pay more than this limit in order to secure accommodation, which they then had to cover from their income from, for example, welfare payments or employment. With rental costs extremely high, HAP limits were of utmost importance and, while these rates were fixed, in Dublin, local authorities do have discretionary power to grant an increase of 50% to the HAP payment, which was known as Homeless HAP. Local authorities outside of Dublin may increase the payments by up to 20%.⁶⁷ A number of participants, therefore, reported that there was room to negotiate higher limits. Rafiq, for example, who had to pay a significant top-up, attempted to convince the Community Welfare Officer to increase the payment he received, and while this attempt initially failed, the payment granted to him was subsequently increased. Aleksander, on the other hand, who lived in Dublin, was able to advocate successfully to receive Homeless HAP with the support of a local Councillor.

“I tried to adjust this matter with the social people themselves and they say, because of the number of children, it is like that and later they recounted and they have the permit to increase it a little bit” (Rafiq, RP5).

“[My rent is] 1200 but Dublin City Council pay 990, which is the highest rate that they can pay. It was not easy to achieve that. So my Councillor of Dublin City Council helped me” (Aleksander, RP6).

While a majority of participants had resorted to topping up HAP payments, only a small number succeeded in advocating for increased HAP payments through a Community Welfare Officer after securing accommodation. Topping up HAP payments

⁶⁷ This discretionary power was increased in July 2022 to 35% as a response to the increased private market rents.

therefore imposed an additional financial burden on participants who were already grappling with tight budgets.

Another way in which participants adapted their housing search strategy in response to the reality of the private rental market was to expand the geographical radius of their search. Most stressed the importance of living in close proximity to their place of employment or college, their children's school and employment opportunities. Safety was another frequently mentioned consideration, with some participants articulating concern about the presence of drug use and criminal activity in some areas, particularly in Dublin. A smaller number highlighted the importance of being close to social networks and community amenities. The criteria prioritised by participants depended on their individual situations; for example, Nauman, who lived in a single household, was seeking accommodation in the neighbourhood of his workplace while Busiswe, a single mother, was searching for a rental property close to her daughter's school and the family's social support networks.

While Nauman and Busiswe did manage to find accommodation in their desired locations, nine participants reported that they had to extend their search radius gradually and, eventually, had no option but to settle for a rental property in locations where they struggled to access education, find employment and establish or maintain social networks. The extent to which participants departed from their initial preferred location(s) depended on the difficulties they experienced with the housing search and the urgency of their housing situation. In instances where participants gained status and wanted to leave DP, where they received notice of termination from their landlord, or if experiencing homelessness or the threat of homelessness, the need to adapt their housing search was particularly pressing. For instance, during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Abeni and her three-year-old twins resided in a small room at a crowded DP centre. Fearing for their health, she rarely left her room. Once Covid-19 restrictions eased, determined to exit the DP centre, Abeni expanded her housing search radius.

"I think, I was feeling choked and, at that moment, I just wanted to leave. So I told myself, anywhere, before Covid, I was thinking of 'Oh, I like [suburban location]', I would look for a place in [Dublin West]. Places like that, places in the South, but, with Covid, I just wanted to leave" (Abeni, RP17).

Thus, expanding the housing search radius was often necessary in order to secure housing. The move to such locations had negative consequences for a number of

participants, for example, by limiting their options to maintain social networks, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

Lastly, several participants revised their expectations downwards and accepted unsuitable accommodation, including cold, damp and overcrowded accommodation (Belloni, 2016; Silviu, 2020). Accepting small spaces was particularly common among participants who lived alone in small studios or in shared accommodation.⁶⁸ Unsuitable or substandard accommodation was also often accepted as a stepping stone in the search for better accommodation. Faiza's brother, for example, shared a small and damp studio apartment that he could barely afford with another man while he was seeking employment. Similarly, Reza's first accommodation after moving to Dublin was substandard but he prioritised moving out of DP over the quality of the accommodation.

"He [Faiza's brother] was receiving eight hundred as a jobseeker's allowance, he had to pay four hundred for a small tiny studio with a guy and it was damp and smelly and unhealthy until he got a job with me" (Faiza, RP18).

"Because he [Reza] was in the transition process, he wanted to have a place, it doesn't matter what it looks like, because he was coming from [DP centre], he wanted to have a place, it doesn't matter, how bad it is" (Reza, RP2, translated by his friend).

While accepting unsuitable accommodation was necessary in order to avoid homelessness, this practice did carry risks, leading to diminished mental and physical health in some cases. Aleksander, for example, suffered from PTSD and his mental health deteriorated rapidly after he moved into a noisy apartment and was subsequently admitted to a psychiatric institution. Yohana, on the other hand, suffered physical health repercussions resulting from the condition of the small studio where she lived, which triggered frequent asthma attacks.

"The windows were very thin and you cannot sleep, you cannot relax [...] At 2 am, those big huge cars collecting rubbish, they are starting to go and they are making a

⁶⁸ Out of the ten single households interviewed, half resided in shared accommodation, while the remaining half inhabited small studio apartments. Two of the participants invited me to their studio apartments, granting insight into their daily experiences of living in these small apartments. The apartments contained all essential amenities and furnishings in one small room (approximately 12 sqm). Despite the small size of these studio apartments, participants paid up to 1,200 euro in rent.

big noise, it reminded me of tanks [referring to the war in his home country]” (Aleksander, RP6, GA⁶⁹).

“Sometimes I wheeze a lot because I cook there, I sleep there, I study there. Everything I do in that same room. If I smell something, especially food, I will wheeze a lot” (Yohana, RP4).

Participants adapted their housing search strategies in three ways: by paying rents that were above the HAP limit, by living far from employment opportunities and social networks, and by renting low-quality accommodation. These findings align with prior research conducted in Ireland and other jurisdictions (see Chapter Two), which has found that refugees often reside in rental accommodations with high rents, distant from social networks, and at the lower end of the quality spectrum (Carter and Osborne, 2009; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Netto, 2011a; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; Ziersch et al., 2017). Notably, Ziersch et al. (2017) highlighted the negative impacts of these conditions on refugees' mental health. While accommodation accessed through these strategies was often intended to be temporary, the lack of alternatives meant that participants often lived in these unsuitable accommodations for several years.

6.3.4. Mobilising Social Networks

Searching for housing through social networks emerged as another distinct housing search practice. Social networks play an important role in facilitating access to housing for refugees (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Flatau et al., 2015; Murdie and Logan, 2011). This section examines the various social networks mobilised by participants in the search for housing. Specifically, it details the types of supports received by participants through their co-ethnic networks and NGOs.

6.3.4.1. Co-Ethnic Networks and their Ability to Facilitate Access to Housing

Several participants secured housing through co-ethnic networks. These co-ethnic networks were often characterised by a mix of close and weak ties which they formed while living in DP, when attending cultural events or by joining co-ethnic social media groups, and facilitated the dissemination of information through informal channels such as word of mouth. For example, Reza found housing through a Kurdish networks which he

⁶⁹ Quotes that are labelled with ‘GA’ stem from narrations that participants shared during a Go-Along.

established while living in DP; Faiza learnt about available accommodation through an Instagram page through which Saudi Arabian students advertised their tenancies before returning home; and Peter learned through a friend about a room vacancy with an African landlord.

“When I arrived I had a few Kurdish friends, they helped me to find a house” (Reza, RP2).

“One Saudi guy, he was finishing [his studies] and was going back home, so he was advertising it on Instagram saying I have one studio if you want to have it [...]. That’s the way how we got it, otherwise, it would be very impossible” (Faiza, RP18).

“I rented a small room in Dublin, it’s an African man with a European wife, and their three children, they live in the whole house. But they have a small room, a store room basically, they rent it out. And that’s that, such arrangements are the only ones you can get” (Peter, RP22).

While these networks provided access to information about available properties, in some cases, these networks also provided access to temporary accommodation. Close ties played a particularly important role in providing access to informal housing arrangements for this study’s participants, with six (five of them from single households and one from a family household), reporting that they stayed temporarily with friends, family or acquaintances directly after moving out of DP. Those who moved into temporary living situations of this kind often cited the stress of living in DP as their reason for wanting to move out quickly. Peter, for example, couch-surfed with an African friend while Chantal moved with her two children temporarily into the small studio her husband was renting.

“My bags were packed. I just spoke to my friend, he lived with his family in Cork, I told him, ‘I don’t want to spend a lot of time here, can you offer me even a bench or a couch?’ He said, ‘Yes, come’” (Peter, RP22).

“I got my papers in June or July and just packed my stuff. It was so fast, I didn’t want to stay any longer because I was going crazy, I had a lot of depression, stress” (Chantal, RP20).

With the exception of Yonas, who accessed temporary accommodation through an Irish friend who he had met through sports, all of these arrangements were accessed

through co-ethnic networks. While these informal arrangements did allow participants to leave DP, they were effectively situations of hidden homelessness, in which participants lived for between two weeks and nine months. The subsequent housing search almost always proved challenging, which meant that these temporary forms of accommodation sometimes turned into longer-term housing arrangements. Yohana, for instance, did not manage to secure housing during the nine months she stayed with a friend and subsequently entered homelessness emergency accommodation.

Despite the fact that participants had very limited means and struggled to access suitable accommodation, a small number who had a good understanding of the private rental market told that they had tried to support others in finding accommodation and, in some instances, even provided them with a place to stay. Yohana, for example, accompanied an acquaintance, who had less experience of searching for accommodation, to rental property viewings. And Aleksander invited his friend to share a small studio with him so his friend could search for accommodation. While participants were in a position to offer only limited support, knowing how difficult the search for housing was compelled a number to support others in any way possible.

Co-ethnic networks, consisting of weak and close ties, supported participants' access to housing by offering valuable information about available properties, as well as providing access to temporary accommodation at the point when participants left DP. Yet, these findings also show that support was limited, and therefore echo Strang et al.'s (2018) observation that refugees' social networks when gaining status often consist of connections with other asylum seekers or refugees, who also have limited access to resources. These co-ethnic social ties and bonds, often connecting individuals of similarly disadvantaged positions, therefore offered only limited access to mobilisable resources and cannot be understood as social capital in a Bourdieusian sense (Anthias, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986).

6.3.4.2. *The Limits of Support from NGOs*

Social links with service providers and local authorities commonly play an important role in supporting refugees to find adequate housing (Aigner, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). In Ireland, several housing and refugee organisations provide people who are transitioning from DP or who have already transitioned with help in accessing housing. Support provided by these organisations includes information on how to navigate the housing market, assistance with filling out relevant forms (for example, to access HAP and social

welfare payments) and, importantly, arranging rental property viewings. While support provided by NGOs was frequently described as helpful by participants, several also identified gaps in the supports available to them. For example, NGOs did play an important role in arranging viewings but these viewings were not always within participants' search radius and, if they were, very often did not lead to them securing a tenancy. The limited support available led, at times, to feelings of frustration and precarious housing situations. Yohana, for example, felt she would have benefited from practical support from support workers, for example, by accompanying her to viewings.

"I asked them, 'Can someone go with me [to a viewing] so that they [landlord] can be sure that I can pay them'. I'm not the type of person who will spend their money without paying my rent. So she [worker] was saying that she cannot go, even to view with me, so I just go by myself, I didn't get any help" (Yohana, RP4).

In contrast to Yohana, the support Aleksander received from a local NGO permitted him to move from DP to a small studio apartment. Yet, while the NGO supported access to accommodation, the accommodation turned out to be inadequate. During a Go-Along, Aleksander reflected on his experience of accessing support (see Case Study 3).

Case Study 3 Go-Along with Aleksander

During the Go-Along, Aleksander led me to the offices of a migrant/refugee organisation which had supported him to secure his first tenancy when he gained status. He recalled how one of the support workers helped him to fill in all the relevant forms in order to access welfare and housing supports: *"She helped me with everything, with papers, with documents with everything"* and also supported him in securing his first tenancy in Dublin by arranging a viewing.

"After I've received my papers, they said okay, dear [Aleksander], you are not an asylum seeker anymore, you have your papers and you have to find a place to live. But it was not easy to find that place, because nobody wants to give the place to someone who is not working [...] she [support worker] helped me to find that place".

Aleksander added that he felt extremely grateful for the support he had received from the NGO during that time: *"I feel indebted, I feel huge gratitude towards this*

organisation and herself". While Aleksander was relieved to have secured a tenancy, he also wondered why the landlady decided to rent the place to him, especially in a situation of acute housing crisis.

After moving, he realised that it was not possible to sleep in the studio apartment he was renting due to constant noise pollution stemming from a nearby street. In addition to the noise, the landlady started to increase the rent gradually: *"It was not possible to sleep, to have a rest there [...] and she [landlady] said, you have to pay more and more [rent]"*. As his housing situation became increasingly untenable, it also had a significant negative impact on Aleksander's mental well-being. This prompted him to seek treatment for depression and seek admission to a recovery centre: *"It [tenancy] cost me a depression. And I went to a recovery centre [...] for three months"*. The Go-Along revealed that, although Aleksander appreciated the support provided by the NGO, it ultimately resulted in a precarious housing situation that negatively impacted his mental well-being. His account highlights the limitations of support received from NGOs.

In brief, Yohana's and Aleksander's accounts highlight the limits of any formal supports available to participants. While Aigner (2019) research on refugees' housing pathways in Vienna found that support from NGOs led to access to housing in a "very social housing sector" (p. 798), a housing subfield that is situated between emergency shelters and regular social housing, the findings of this research indicate that, although NGOs facilitated viewings, they did not provide direct access to housing.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences of transitioning from asylum seeker to refugee. Refugees linked gaining status to increased social rights, the removal of the negative symbolic capital associated with the status of asylum seeker, and a new found freedom to start their lives in Ireland (Bourdieu et al., 1994). Gaining status therefore signified the end point of a period of 'ontological liminality', characterised by marginalisation and an absence of control over their lives while living in DP (O'Reilly, 2018). While this critical moment in participants' lives was accompanied by feelings of relief, it also evoked feelings of exhaustion arising from a prolonged period of having to cope with the uncertainty of the asylum process and life in DP. Gaining status, therefore, represented "a significant material and psychological rupture" (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022, p.13) of refugees' housing journeys in Ireland.

This chapter also explored how participants learned to navigate a new bureaucratic field, the field of mainstream welfare provision (Obeid, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). Transitioning from the welfare system of DP to the mainstream welfare system required participants to acquire field-specific knowledge that can be understood as a form of administrative or navigational cultural capital (Masood and Azfar Nisar, 2020; Yosso, 2005). Participants drew on various social networks, including those from within DP and from NGOs in the community, when acquiring the administrative or navigational capital necessary to successfully navigate this new bureaucratic field (Yosso, 2005).

Gaining status also represented the starting point for participants' search for housing in the private rental market. The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that participants attempted to acquire a better understanding of the private rental market through their social networks within DP, their social links to NGOs, and media consumption, frequently also emphasising the importance of gaining first-hand experience by actively searching for housing (Murdie, 2002). Yet, their attempts to acquire an in-depth understanding of the private rental market were often impeded by the experiences of housing exclusion as silence, which amplified their sense of marginalisation (Rudert et al., 2017). A combination of limited housing stock, low affordability and housing market discrimination (Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018; Grotti et al., 2018; Gusciute et al., 2022; Hearne and Murphy, 2017), combined with the labour market exclusion participants experienced during the asylum process, cemented their disadvantaged position in the private rental market (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Netto, 2011a; Weidinger and Kordel, 2023).

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrates that the development of an in-depth understanding of the private rental market and its underlying mechanisms of exclusion, which were strongly associated with poverty and race, was critical and also led many to adapt their housing search strategies. Participants employed strategies such as concealing their economic situation and/or social identity, persuading landlords of their deservingness, adapting or lowering their housing expectations and searching for accommodation by drawing on co-ethnic networks and social links to NGOs (Ager and Strang, 2008; McKee et al., 2020; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019b; Strang et al., 2018). These adaptations led some into precarious accommodation with negative impacts for their mental health (Ziersch et al., 2017).

7. From DP to Housing: New Beginnings, Instabilities and Risks

Having presented a detailed account of participants' experiences of gaining status and their housing searches thereafter, this chapter turns to participants' experiences of the move from DP to the private rental market. Access to adequate and secure housing is essential to the settlement process and well-being of refugees (Ager and Strang, 2008; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Ziersch and Due, 2018). This chapter begins by documenting the housing journeys of the study's participants after leaving DP and explores the meanings participants attached to this period of transition. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the field of the private rental market (Aigner, 2019; Bourdieu, 2005), as experienced by refugee renters, including their experiences of housing insecurity and homelessness. The chapter concludes by charting how the unequal landlord-tenant relationship shaped participants' practices and strategies. Here, we begin to see that the uncertainty of the private rental market created new challenges for the study's participants as they navigated the transition to housing and attempted to regain control over their lives having exited DP.

7.1. From DP to Housing

This first section details refugees' experiences as they transitioned from DP to housing. Specifically, it examines their housing journeys, as well as their perceptions and interpretations of this critical period of transition.

7.1.1. Refugees' Housing Journeys

This section presents the study's participants' housing journeys from the point at which they were granted status. A detailed analysis of each participant's experience of residential mobility across time (Clapham, 2005) resulted in two distinct types of housing journeys: *linear* and *turbulent* housing journeys, respectively. This typology of the housing journeys of the study's participants was developed through the continued examination, contrasting and comparison of refugees' residential mobility patterns, with a view to identifying patterns and constructing distinct types of housing journeys (Stapley et al., 2022). Table 4 presents a selection of salient examples for each of these two housing journeys from the point when participants gained status, including the time spent in DP thereafter and their subsequent housing situations.

Table 4 Participants' Housing Journeys After Gaining Status (Examples)

Participants' Housing Journeys After Gaining Status* (Examples)	
Linear Housing Journey (14 households)	
Busiswe, age 38	DP** (5 months) -> Private Rented Accommodation with HAP
Nasrin, age 30	DP (3 months) -> Private Rented Accommodation with HAP (2 years 3 months) -> Move to bigger Private Rented Accommodation with HAP due to birth of first child
Malika, age 47	DP (7 months) -> Local Authority Housing
Turbulent Housing Journey (7 households)	
Faiza***, age 35	Housesitting (2 weeks) -> renting a room (9 months) -> Shared Private Rented Accommodation, Studio (10 months) -> Shared Private Rented Accommodation (2 years, 6 months) -> Shared Private Rented Accommodation (two bed)
Peter, age 49	DP (1 month) -> Staying with Friends (2 months) -> Staying in BnB (2 weeks) -> Renting a room (4 months) -> Renting a room with HAP (2 months) -> Emergency Homelessness Accommodation (1 week) -> Emergency Homelessness Accommodation (B&B)

* This table contains data extracted from the analysis of 21 participants' housing journeys. One participant who had gained status four months previously had not moved out of DP at the time of the interview.

** This indicates the time spent in DP after gaining status and does not include the time spent in DP before gaining status.

*** Faiza was the only participant who did not access DP during the asylum process.

The data presented in Table 4 demonstrate that fourteen of the twenty-one households⁷⁰ embarked on *linear* housing journeys in that they left DP accommodation only once they had secured private rented accommodation with the support of the HAP or other rent supplement payments. Eight of these 14 households had children under the age of 18 years and, for this reason, did not consider temporary and insecure accommodation to be a realistic option. This *linear* housing journey is illustrated in Table

⁷⁰ One participant had not moved out of DP by the time of the interview and is therefore not included in this analysis of housing journeys after DP.

5 in the case of Busiswe, who had recently gained status and intended to stay long-term in the accommodation she first secured after moving out of DP. Nasrin, who also took a *linear housing* journey, had transitioned out of DP ten years previously and, since this initial move from DP to housing, had moved only once to accommodate the needs of her growing family. Households that followed a *linear housing journey* frequently had children and commonly accessed accommodation through either direct or NGO-mediated contact with estate agents or landlords. While Malika's housing journey also fits the *linear housing journey*, it differed from the housing journeys of others in this category in that she and her family had received extensive support from a non-for-profit organisation as well as a local authority in securing accommodation as part of the Greece Relocation programme (Arnold et al., 2021). This meant that Malika and her family were accommodated in local authority housing after gaining status.

In contrast to these *linear housing journeys*, seven participants embarked on a *turbulent* housing journey; typically, leaving DP shortly after gaining status and moving into temporary accommodation where they lived with friends or acquaintances while searching for longer-term accommodation. All, apart from one, who embarked on this *turbulent* housing journey were from single households. Faiza's housing journey (see Table 4), for example, shows that her initial housing journey was characterised by a series of precarious accommodation situations, including house-sitting, renting a room in a family household and sharing a small studio apartment with her brother. However, once she and her brother had secured paid employment, they were able to move to a two-bedroom apartment that better met their needs. In contrast to Faiza and her brother, who were able to improve their housing situation over time, Peter, who similar to Faiza, stayed in a range of insecure housing situations after gaining status had not yet succeeded in improving his housing situation and was accessing homelessness emergency accommodation at the time of the interview. These *turbulent* housing journeys were characterised by periods spent living in insecure, temporary accommodation, including living in overcrowded households or in situations of hidden homelessness (i.e. staying with friends or family members), which meant that they were at a higher risk of experiencing periods of homelessness⁷¹. A mix of weak and close ties to co-ethnics and/or locals was central in facilitating their access

⁷¹ While research has found that staying with friends may place individuals at higher risk of conflict and exploitation (Teixeira, 2008, Aigner, 2019, Walsh et al., 2016), participants in this study did not report difficulties or discord while living in these situations, possibly due to the fact that a majority were able to move on within a relatively short period of time.

to these temporary forms of accommodations. Three of the seven households who followed this *turbulent* housing journey had accessed homelessness emergency accommodation at some stage. In all three cases, the time spent living in homelessness accommodation was less than one year, after which they secured private rented accommodation with HAP support⁷².

Table 5 presents data on the number of participants who accessed different accommodation types, by those who followed linear and turbulent housing journeys, respectively.

Table 5 Accommodation Types Accessed by Households Since Leaving DP, by Turbulent and Linear Journeys

Accommodation Type	Turbulent	Linear	Total
Private Rented Sector with HAP*	5	13	18
Private Rented Sector without HAP	3	0	3
Local Authority Housing	0	1	1
Staying with Friends	4	0	4
Staying with Family	1	0	1
Staying with Irish Host Family	0	1	1
Emergency Homelessness Accommodation	3	1	4
Supported Homelessness Accommodation	2	0	2
Family Hub	0	1	1
Rehabilitation centre	1	0	1

* This includes households renting with rent supplements prior to the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment.

⁷² The three participants accessed homelessness emergency services for a duration between two weeks and nine months. Accessing homelessness emergency accommodation for more than six months is defined as long-term homelessness by the Irish Government (O'Sullivan, 2016). Yet, following the findings from Waldron (2019)'s analysis of emergency homeless shelter use in Dublin, experiencing a one-off period of homelessness that lasts less than nine months would fit the characteristics of the transitional homelessness cluster which captures relatively short, one-off stays in homeless emergency accommodation.

These data (Table 5) confirm that participants who followed a *turbulent* housing journey were more likely to access a larger number of insecure accommodation types than participants who followed a *linear housing journey*. The latter group usually succeeded in sourcing and securing private rented accommodation with a HAP subsidy. Further examination of the paths followed by both groups uncovered differences between them in terms of their priorities in exiting DP, the support networks available to them, the accommodation types occupied at the point of exiting DP, and the level of security they experienced in these accommodation types. These characteristics are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Housing Paths and their Characteristics

Housing Paths	Priority in exiting DP	Support Networks	Types of Accommodation	Security
<i>Turbulent</i>	Leaving DP as quickly as possible	Strong and weak ties to co-ethnics and/or locals	Temporary accommodation in PRS	Low
<i>Linear</i>	Securing a long-term tenancy	Direct or NGO-mediated contact with landlords/estate agents. Greece Relocation Scheme	PRS with HAP	Medium

While participants in the linear group were anxious to secure a long-term tenancy before exiting DP, those who followed a turbulent journey prioritised exiting DP as quickly as possible. This led the latter group to rely on weak ties, often to co-ethnics and/or locals, to access temporary accommodation that offered a low level of security. In contrast, the linear group delayed entry to the housing market until they had secured a tenancy that offered, in relative terms, a more stable housing situation.

At the time of the interview, a majority of study participants lived in private rented accommodation with the support of the HAP (Table 7). This suggests that participants who embarked on a *turbulent housing journey* after an initial period of moving between a number of temporary and insecure accommodation types were subsequently able to carve out a route to housing, either by accessing private rented accommodation with a HAP payment or, in the case of two participants, by independently financing rental payments.

Table 7 Participants' Living Situation at the Time of the Interview

Living Situation	Number
Private Rented Sector with the HAP	17
Direct Provision	1
Private Rented Sector without the HAP	2
Homelessness Temporary Accommodation	1
Local Authority Housing	1

Drawing upon Clapham's (2005) housing pathway approach, this section has documented the housing journeys of the study's participants after leaving DP. The typology presented demonstrates that *turbulent housing* journeys were initially characterised by frequent moves, precarious and insecure housing situations and, at times, situations of hidden homelessness. This housing journey aligns with research conducted in Canada, the UK and Austria, which has shown that refugees frequently move between temporary accommodation types during their early housing journeys, thereby rendering them vulnerable to experiences of hidden and/or literal homelessness (Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Kissoon, 2010; Teixeira, 2008; Walsh et al., 2016). However, in contrast to the findings of these studies, two-thirds of this study's participants embarked on a *linear housing journey* characterised by fewer moves and these households, which frequently had children, succeeded in finding private rented accommodation with a housing subsidy. While in other jurisdictions, such as the UK, refugees are evicted into homelessness once they gain status, in Ireland, refugee households can remain in DP accommodation until they secure accommodation in the private rental market, which clearly reduces their risk of homelessness during this transition phase.

7.1.2. *Regaining Control, Finding Peace and Living a Normal Life*

Having presented a detailed account of refugees' housing journeys, this subsection turns to participants' experiences of moving from DP to housing and the meanings they attached to this period of transition. Bourdieu (2000) posits that when entering a new field, the habitus – a set of dispositions that guides individuals' behaviours and perceptions – adapts “gradually, progressively and imperceptibly” (Bourdieu, 2000, p.11) to the newly

encountered field. This section therefore examines how participants perceived and interpreted this transition from DP to housing.

The transition from DP to private rented accommodation was described by participants as a critical turning point in their lives and was frequently linked by them to regaining control, finding peace and the opportunity to live a more normal life. Regaining control stood in stark contrast to participants' experience of living in DP, where their lives had been governed by the institutionalised structures of the DP system and where they often felt powerless. Abhik described the process of regaining control by pointing out that he and his family were now finally able to live in accordance with their own wants and needs; for example, in establishing their own daily routine and preparing food according to their dietary preferences: *"We have full control in our day-to-day life and how we want to live, what we want to do"* (Abhik, RP9). For Nora, regaining control meant being free to come and go as she pleased, without feeling that her every movement was controlled by DP centre staff.

"You have your peace, you have every single thing you want out here and you're not bothering to get out, to come back, nobody asks you if it is late, nobody can ask where you're going or not, so it's such a relief" (Nora, RP14).

Moving out of DP not only meant that participants could live life on their own terms but also led them to finally feel calm and composed. While life in DP was characterised by overcrowding and frequent tensions among residents, as well as between residents and centre staff/management, with negative impacts for their well-being, moving to private rented accommodation often went hand-in-hand with having more physical space, privacy, and finding peace⁷³. Reza and Nauman, who had shared rooms with other residents during the many years they lived in DP, appreciated finally having their own space where they could feel a sense of comfort and control.

"[When moving out of DP I felt] happy, because first time alone, because in the [DP] hostel, there are always some people dirty, people talk a lot, drink a lot" (Reza, RP2).

"I made a big mistake. And the mistake was that why didn't I move earlier? Although, I had to pay a lot of money, in terms of deposit and rent contribution and bills and

⁷³ This was not the case for the participants who initially moved from DP into situations of informal homelessness or homelessness emergency accommodation.

everything, still, I was feeling what peace! Quiet, peace. There is nobody else in my room” (Nauman, RP10, GA).

The sense of tranquillity that accompanied life in private accommodation was highlighted by many participants and also depicted as critical to their recovery from the mental stress they had experienced while living in DP. Busiswe, for example, explained that she was so focused on her and her daughter’s survival while living in DP that it was only after leaving that she understood the exhaustion resulting from this constant struggle. Having their own place allowed her to ‘rest’ for the first time since arriving in Ireland.

“I was tired. The first few weeks it was lovely, but I rested a lot, I realised, you know, mentally and physically, I was pushing myself hard and I just rested” (Busiswe, RP19).

While moving out of DP meant regaining control over one’s life and enjoying the privacy and peace that came with living in one’s own space, this move and the reality of living in a community also represented a more ‘normal life’. Living a ‘normal life’ opened up new possibilities to connect to the community and to feel a sense of belonging, as Busiswe explained: *“I am in a normal situation where I am with everyone, I am part of the community, I belong to a community”*. Nauman stressed that being back in control of his financial situation was integral to, once again, feeling normal.

“Before in the DP centre, it was abnormal, it was not normal, now I feel upright, as a human being, as a citizen. This is good if you are paying for your bread and butter and salt and potatoes and everything” (Nauman, RP10, GA).

In brief, while gaining status marked a turning point in participants’ legal and symbolic status, providing them with the right to remain in Ireland and the freedom to start their lives (as outlined in Chapter Six), moving out of DP was critical to actualising these newly-won freedoms. Transitioning from DP to housing was depicted as ‘moment’ of regaining of control, strongly suggesting that participants experienced a stronger sense of ontological security (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Giddens, 1984). A sense of peace and calmness contrasted strongly with the pressures participants had experienced while living in the overcrowded and tense environment of DP. Lastly, a more ‘normal’ life, characterised by community living and increased financial autonomy, stood in sharp contrast to the ‘space of exception’ that DP represented (Agamben, 2000). Perhaps

significantly, unlike other low-income renters who frequently describe the negative psychosocial impacts of living in private rented accommodation (McKee et al., 2020), this study's participants perceived moving to the private rental market as a positive turning point in their lives.

7.1.3. *Disruptions and Delayed Adjustment*

While the transition from DP to housing was perceived as a positive turning point, the transition from the familiar field of DP to what was considered a more normal life in the private rental market also brought uncertainty and required a period of adjustment. Bourdieu has observed that the adaptation of habitus when moving from one field to another takes time (Bourdieu, 2000). This process of adaptation was particularly evident in Abhik's account, as he explained that it took him several months to adjust to life outside of DP. While Abhik appreciated finally living among "normal people", he realised that he had internalised being an asylum seeker while living in DP and continued to carry feelings of being different after he moved from DP to housing. This resulted in a perceived distance from "normal people" in the neighbourhood where he lived.

"Before you woke up and you met asylum seekers, refugees, now you wake up and you meet just the normal people but you feel yourself like you are still a refugee, you know. So, at the back of your mind, you got used to that feeling and it is quite strong. I think it is there, for a period of time, that, although you have the right to live a normal life, you are not quite as normal as other citizens" (Abhik, RP9).

Abhik's account demonstrates that there can be a time lag between moving out of DP and the habitus adjusting to life in the new and more 'normal' field of the private rental market. While moving from DP to housing presented new opportunities, it also brought new pressures and expectations, as Grace explained during a Go-Along.

Case Study 4 Go-Along with Grace

The Go-Along with Grace took place in the summer of 2021, nine months after she moved with her two children from DP to a house in a mid-sized commuter town, one hour from Dublin. Due to an impairment which made it difficult for Grace to walk, the Go-Along involved a drive along her usual route to drop her children to school. During the drive, Grace recalled that, after leaving DP, her children began to expect what they considered a 'normal life' to entail, which included having a Christmas tree like their

peers. However, as a single mother managing a very restricted budget, Grace could not afford this 'normal' life.

"They are in a normal school, they are in a normal place, normal conversations, there is no more this thing of when they would go to school with the bus from [DP centre], everyone would know these are the kids from [DP Centre]. So, here, they are just normal kids in a normal school, so they also wanted normal, so they also wanted Christmas. And I had no money for a Christmas tree".

Thus, while moving out of DP brought 'normality', it also created significant pressure to be 'normal', particularly in terms of having access to financial resources. Building local support networks proved central to alleviating some of these financial pressures. For instance, that Christmas, the school liaison officer organised a Christmas hamper for the family. Grace pointed out that transition support workers played a central role in connecting the family to local supports. After stopping her car in front of the local youth club, Grace explained that an integration officer, who based in the DP centre where she stayed, had connected the family to the youth club's afterschool project.

"The integration officer in [DP centre] provided support when I was coming out [of DP], so she linked me with this afterschool project, she helped me to look for places for the school for the kids, she assisted me with all of that. I got loads of support".

This youth club subsequently became an important source of support for Grace's family. Grace reflected on these transition supports, explaining that they provided critical enablers to the transition to housing: *"That first year was really hard, I found it really difficult and just that support that I was getting from those guys, it meant so much to me"*. Grace's account highlights that the transition from DP to housing inevitably disrupted social support networks. As a result, transition support workers were essential in connecting families to local supports.

As evident in Grace's case, social networks played a key role in supporting participants' transition from DP to private rented accommodation. Social networks consisted of a mix of support from friends and acquaintances as well as formal supports from housing and refugee organisations. While these networks provided help with accessing housing and welfare supports, as discussed in Chapter Six, these same networks also provided support once participants moved into the community, for example, by

connecting participants to local language classes, supporting registrations with local GPs, and linking them to resources such as youth clubs.

The disruption to social networks described by Grace and the stress associated with the move from DP to housing were commented on by single mothers, in particular. For example, Abeni initially feared that she had made a mistake by moving out of DP just a few months after gaining status because it left her without the practical support of the DP community. She had hoped to find employment in the social care sector, having qualifications in this area, however, she could only avail of three hours of subsidised creche fees per day from the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. Because she could not afford the cost of full-time creche fees, Abeni was unable to pursue her desired goals.

“If I would have been still in the hostel, I might have gotten a job because then I have a minder in the hostel, someone living in the same centre that comes to help me looking after the kids while I go to work, but in the house here there is really nobody around” (Abeni, RP17).

In summary, although moving from DP to private rented accommodation marked a positive turning point in participants’ lives, participants needed time to adjust, both emotionally and in a practical sense, to this new field of the private rental market. Abhik’s account demonstrated that he had internalised the otherness imposed on him during the asylum process and that he continued to feel ‘different’, even having left DP behind. This experience is consistent with Bourdieu’s observation that the habitus takes time to adjust to a new field (Bourdieu, 2000). In addition, for many participants, the move from DP to housing disrupted their social networks and the support they had received through those networks. Strang et al.’s (2018) research on the transition experiences of refugees in the UK has similarly found that moving accommodation is associated with a number of negative consequences, including disrupted access to social networks and services such as GPs.

7.2. Insecurity in the Private Rental Market

While moving from DP to housing meant regaining a sense of control over one’s life, this new-won freedom was fragile as participants were soon confronted with the uncertainty of the private rental market. This section examines participants’ experiences of housing insecurity in the private rental market, before detailing experiences of homelessness and their aspirations for more permanent housing.

7.2.1. *Living with the Fear of Homelessness*

Insecure tenure and the risk of homelessness are associated with negative consequences for physical and mental health (Palmer, 2011; Ziersch and Due, 2018) as well as family life (Oudshoorn et al., 2019). This subsection explores participants' fears about the prospect of homelessness while renting in the private rental market. In Ireland, tenancy terminations have become the leading cause of homelessness (Allen and Benjaminsen, 2020; Morrin, 2019b; O'Sullivan, 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the threat of receiving a tenancy termination notice and the associated risk of experiencing homelessness were omnipresent in participants' accounts.

"I hope, I wish that I stay long-term [in this apartment], until, possibly I could get a social housing but, even when you sign the lease, you are told that you may be requested to vacate if the owner decides to sell" (Buiswe, RP19).

"If he [landlord] says move out, it would be really hard to get a house at the moment and I hear from television that there are many people in emergency accommodation, you know, that's why. Life [in emergency accommodation] is difficult really, you know" (Nasrin RP7).

Several participants pointed to the fact that this threat was not unique to their situation but, rather, a wider issue that also affects Irish-born renters. Yet, while some Irish households have the option to move back home (Bobek et al., 2021), this is not the case for refugees, leaving them at a particularly high risk of experiencing homelessness. Faiza, for example, pointed out how the lack of social networks, combined with limited financial means, exacerbated the risk of homelessness.

"Back home, you wouldn't think about this problem, you have family, you have friends, you would never think, oh, I would end up homeless like here, everyone has a roof over their heads. Here in Ireland, in Europe in general, it is a dangerous thing, if you don't have money, you are on the streets. No one would ask about you, like you wouldn't have family, friends' support" (Faiza, RP18).

Six of the study's 22 participants had received a notice of the termination of their tenancy from their landlord; three of these were related to the sale of the property they were renting; a further two were issued with notice to quit because of a larger number of individuals living in the rental property than was deemed permissible by the landlord; and one had their tenancy terminated because the requirement for them to work from home

was not viewed acceptable by their landlady. Of the six households affected by notices of termination (Reza, Sherko, Rafiq, Chantal, Peter and Aleksander), all struggled to secure rental accommodation within the notice period they received, thereby placing them at risk of homelessness. While just two participants – Peter, in a single household and Sherko with his young family – were forced to enter homeless emergency accommodation as a direct consequence of these contract terminations, the remaining four households had no option but to move out of their preferred neighbourhood or town as a direct result of these tenancy terminations.

Next to tenancy terminations, family reunification was associated with greater vulnerability to homelessness (Smith et al., 2020). Refugees are only eligible to apply for increased housing assistance payments once their families have arrived in the country, which means that searching for housing prior to their family's arrival is effectively not possible. Rasheed and Nauman had both moved from DP to accommodation in a studio and a room in a shared house, respectively, while awaiting the outcome of their application for family reunification. This accommodation was temporary since it was clear that their accommodation did not have adequate space to accommodate their families upon their arrival in Ireland. At the time of the interview, the arrival of the families of both Nauman and Rasheed was imminent and both expressed strong concern about the possibility that their families might be forced to enter homelessness emergency accommodation upon arrival.

“When I listen to my friends and their experiences, I am scared. I always think about what to do when my family comes, because it is very, very difficult [to find a home] [...] They [NGO support workers] have advised me when your family comes you have no option, you have to go to the homeless and register there, to give you a place” (Rasheed, RP12).

“I hope they will allow me [to apply for HAP], and say, ‘Ok, you can go ahead, you can find a house’. If I find a house, it will be good. I don’t want to go again to the Direct Provision centre, and I don’t want to go again to the emergency accommodation. I am very cooperative [...] I understand the situation, I understand the housing crisis, yeah, but still there are houses” (Nauman, RP10).

While Nauman and Rasheed would have preferred to search for housing while they awaited the arrival of their family, the fact that they did not have access to better welfare

and housing payments did not permit them to secure housing prior to the arrival of their families, leaving them vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.

In brief, participants' accounts demonstrate that, in general, participants experienced the private rental market as highly insecure and, as a result, worried about the threat of homelessness. While only two of the six households that received a tenancy termination notice entered into homelessness emergency accommodation, the risk of experiencing homelessness featured in all of their accounts and was heightened by the absence of family support. Research in Canada and Australia has similarly identified evictions by private landlords as increasing the risk of homelessness (St. Arnault and Merali, 2019a; Walsh et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2017). The findings presented in this section also suggest that family reunification created particular vulnerabilities and threats often associated with fears about the potential loss of housing and homelessness (Smith et al., 2020).

7.2.2. Experiences of Homelessness

Having detailed participants' perspectives on the insecurity of the private rental market, this section details experiences of homelessness at various stages of participants' housing journeys. The five participants who lived in homelessness emergency accommodation had accessed this accommodation for periods of between two weeks and nine months⁷⁴. Their circumstances prior to accessing homelessness emergency accommodation varied and included: living in private rented accommodation and having received a tenancy termination notice; the closure of the DP centre where the participant resided; leaving temporary accommodation provided by a friend; and following discharge from a recovery centre. Emergency accommodation usually consisted of a mix of single rooms for families in hotels or B&Bs and beds in shared accommodation for single households. Irrespective of how long participants stayed in emergency accommodation, all experienced this time as extremely challenging. Sherko, for example, had accessed emergency accommodation after receiving a notice of termination and found it particularly difficult to share a small single hotel room with his family without any facilities to prepare food. Abhik, who along with his family was moved to homelessness emergency accommodation after the DP

⁷⁴ Peter was accessing emergency accommodation at the time data collection for this research concluded.

centre where they stayed closed down⁷⁵, was desperate to start a ‘normal’ family life, having already spent three years in DP.

“It was just a hotel, just one room for the three of us. We had no kitchen, we just had one room and you had to eat outside, you are not allowed to eat inside” (Sherko, RP₃).

“Two weeks were quite horrific for us as a family because, first of all, we wanted to move out to our own house or home after nearly three years [of DP], not into an emergency hotel” (Abhik, RP₉).

When experiencing homelessness, single households seemed to have received less support than family households. For instance, Aleksander had to endure sleeping rough for several weeks, leaving him vulnerable to street violence, before eventually being allocated a bed in a shared room with five other individuals, some of whom were drug users. After making numerous calls and sending letters detailing the detrimental impact of his living conditions on his mental health, Aleksander was finally relocated to supported emergency accommodation. In this new setting, he shared a room with only one person and the residents were prohibited from consuming drugs or alcohol on the premises.

“After three months in the recovery centre, I came here and there was nowhere to live and I lived on the streets, using that freephone⁷⁶, for nine months. Nine months of free phone. Nine months on the streets. Terrible, horrific, awful experience. Many times my belongings were stolen and many times all those people whom I hate to deal with, they try to bully me and to fight, to beat me. So it was a horrific experience” (Aleksander, RP₆).

Drug use in single emergency accommodation was a frequently mentioned problem and one that left Yohana, who was initially placed in shared accommodation,

⁷⁵ While refugees are asked to leave Direct Provision once they have gained status, and some participants experienced some pressure from centre managers to do so, it is not common practice for DP Centres to evict people into homelessness. Abhik was an exception to this rule as the DP centre he stayed at with his family was closed shortly after they gained status and, since they were no longer in the asylum process, they were no longer considered eligible for a transfer to another DP centre. This meant that they had no option but to enter homelessness emergency accommodation.

⁷⁶ Freephone is the name of the hotline provided by Dublin City Council for people in need of emergency accommodation.

feeling terrified of her roommates. Similar to Aleksander, Yohana was able to advocate for a single room by demonstrating that this situation was detrimental to her mental health.

“I don’t drink, I don’t smoke, I don’t take any drugs and she wants to put me with them [drug users] and I cannot. That’s why I cried a lot and they put me in another separate room but, still, they were checking on me like every few hours to make sure that you are okay” (Yohana, RP4).

The accounts of the study’s participants signal the differential treatment of family and single households experiencing homelessness, which can leave single households particularly exposed to violence and drug use. Aleksander and Yohana both demonstrated strong navigational skills in highlighting their mental health issues in order to advocate for access to better quality accommodation although, in Aleksander’s case, this took far longer, drawing attention to possible gender differences in responses to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

In an analysis of emergency homeless shelter use in Dublin, Waldron et al. (2019) identified a transitional homelessness cluster among shelter users, characterised by a one-off period of homelessness lasting less than nine months and relatively short, one-off stays in homeless emergency accommodation. The five households who accessed homelessness emergency services for a duration between two weeks and nine months can be considered to fall into this cluster of transitional homelessness (Waldron et al., 2019).

Participants who had not accessed emergency homelessness accommodation were acutely aware of the difficulties people faced upon becoming homeless and tried to avoid emergency accommodation at all costs. Participants’ fears converged on the loss of privacy and freedom associated with the move from one institutionalised setting (DP) to another (homelessness accommodation) and anxiety about becoming separated from their families. After gaining status, Yonas couch-surfed in the rental property of a friend and, as a result, lost access to the increased homeless HAP payment. To regain access to the higher rate, a housing transition support worker suggested Yonas access emergency homeless accommodation. Yet, Yonas decided against it because he dreaded the institutionalised nature of such accommodation. Rafiq, on the other hand, was offered homelessness emergency accommodation when he was not able to find a place to rent for himself and his family.

“They [NGO name] came up with a solution, moving to a homeless accommodation, sharing accommodation and welfare payments. I said, ‘Can I think about that?’ Now I have the freedom. I came from the same situation. Everything is very scheduled. I took a week to think about it and I said, ‘Thank you for the offer, but I want to manage myself’” (Yonas, RP1).

“I was offered emergency accommodation, for myself I found it very difficult. It was like a nightmare. You are separated from your family and live in emergency accommodation with only males. We are a family. This is very, very difficult. And I have heard from other people that it gets very problematic” (Rafiq, RP5).

To avoid entering emergency homelessness accommodation, Yonas continued to couch surf, which was effectively a situation of hidden homelessness, while Rafiq moved with his family to a remote rural village far from their social networks to secure an affordable rental property for his family.

In summary, a small but significant number of the study’s households experienced transitional homelessness at various stages of their housing journey (Waldron et al., 2019). While having to access emergency homelessness accommodation was challenging and traumatic for all, the experience was particularly difficult for single households who were accommodated in shared accommodation and, in one case, had no option but to sleep rough. In the UK, there is evidence that refugee family households receive more support than single households when experiencing homelessness (Strang et al., 2018). By emphasising their vulnerability and needs, the two single households in the current study that experienced homelessness did successfully secure access to accommodation that provided greater privacy. This finding resonated with Cook and Hole’s (2020) research on street homelessness in Canada, which emphasises the significance of presenting oneself as more in need of assistance than others in order to secure access to better accommodation. Lastly, the findings presented in this section draw strong attention to participants’ determination to avoid homelessness emergency accommodation if at all possible.

7.2.3. The Aspiration of Permanent and Secure Housing

Living in an insecure private rental market shaped participants’ aspirations in relation to housing. All except Malika, who lived in local authority housing, explicitly articulated the aspiration of securing more permanent accommodation, either as homeowners or through a local authority housing allocation. The lack of economic capital meant that homeownership was out of reach for the vast majority of the study’s

participants, which meant that local authority housing was the only possible route to secure, affordable accommodation. Abeni and Busiswe, for example, both stressed the importance of having housing with guaranteed stability. While homeownership would clearly provide security, Busiswe pointed out that, as a single mother on a part-time wage, homeownership was very unlikely.

“What are the possibilities of someone like me, as a lone parent buying a house? There are no possibilities, you know. I have my daughter here, there is no way that I can work so many hours, you know, I will always be limited to that part-time work. Work that I can be a mom. Because being a mom, it’s first for me. [...] So having that thing, a council house, it is a security” (Busiswe, RP19).

“The difference between being in a rented and in a council house, with the rent the landlord can tell you, ‘I want to sell my house’, but with the council house, there is a more guarantee that this is your space and nobody is going to chase you out unless you want to go out” (Abeni, RP17).

While accessing local authority housing was an aspiration that featured in the accounts of several participants, among those who had spent several years on the local authority housing waiting list, this aspiration was fading at a rapid pace. Reza, for example, had been waiting for more than six years for local authority housing and, during these years, had been forced to move several times upon receiving notice to quit in a number of rental properties. Reza continued to make inquiries about his current place on the housing transfer list⁷⁷ while simultaneously acknowledging that there was simply a shortage of affordable housing: *“I am waiting more than six years, five and a half, six, like that. I’m waiting, I don’t know when. Now, no houses, that’s the problem”* (Reza, RP2, GA). Similarly, Rafiq had almost given up on the hope of a local authority housing allocation because, despite waiting for five years, his family’s place on the transfer list had only marginally improved.

“There are no houses and they are building only since the last two years, three years, they did start building. But still, all together, maybe less than 100 houses. And my

⁷⁷ Participants who were in receipt of HAP were considered to be housed and therefore no longer listed on the local authority’s waiting list. However, participants had the option of joining a transfer list where they were still considered for local authority housing.

number, waiting list number is 2443. So you might wait for about 15 years” (Rafiq, RP5).

Only Malika and her family, who received a housing allocation as part of the Greece Relocation scheme,⁷⁸ lived in local authority housing. One other participant, Chantal, had been offered local authority housing but turned down this offer because the estate where the property was located had recently been the subject of media coverage for incidents of racialised attacks and anti-social behaviour. For this reason, she felt that it was not a safe environment, particularly for young children: *“Many racist people are living there. After we have read the news, we said, no, we cannot go”* (Chantal, RP20). Refusing this offer of accommodation meant that the local authority would not consider Chantal’s family for the allocation of social housing for a period of one year.

While several participants aspired to purchase a house in the future, only one participant, Faiza, had concrete plans to do so. Faiza was working full-time, was not eligible for local authority housing, and explained that having lived in Ireland for several years, her dreams had gradually shifted and now aligned with the widespread Irish aspiration of home ownership.

“When I was asking people at my workplace, ‘What’s your dream?’ [they would say] ‘To buy my own house’, and I was like ‘This is not a dream!’, like this is not a dream to buy your own house. And now I have turned into one of them: if you ask me, ‘What do you want? What is your goal?’ – ‘I want to buy my own house’ [chuckles]. I was like wow, by living here, I became one of them actually [laughs]” (Faiza, RP18).

However, Faiza quickly encountered numerous challenges after embarking on the house purchase journey: the high rent she was paying limited her ability to save for a deposit; housing prices were outgrowing her savings each consecutive year; and her residence permit did not allow her to apply for the financial supports that the Irish Government provided for first-time buyers.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Families who arrived through the Greece relocation scheme were initially housed for several months in reception centres before getting dispersed across the country where the relevant local authorities allocated local authority housing.

⁷⁹ Faiza attempted to apply for a Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. She was subsequently informed that her Stamp 4 resident permit did not allow her to apply for the scheme. She then sent letters to several TDs detailing her experience and advocating for a change to the scheme’s eligibility criteria.

In summary, in the context of an insecure private rental market, participants aspired to more permanent housing, either in the form of homeownership or local authority housing. While the housing career approach traditionally assumed that households aspire to take steps towards homeownership (Kendig, 1984), particularly once they have a family, Bolt and Van Kempen (2002) suggest that what households view as a successful housing journey very much depends on the particular housing context. As discussed in Chapter One, the Irish context, is one characterised by a housing and homelessness crisis. For participants in the current study, homeownership was very far out of reach for the vast majority, and, for this reason, many aspired to access local authority housing. However, in the context of lengthy waiting lists for social housing, housing allocation of this kind was highly unlikely to transpire in the foreseeable future. In addition to the considerable waiting times restricting access to local authority housing, Chantal's case also showed that the fear of racialised harassment could for some refugee households act as an additional barrier to accessing local authority housing (Buczkowska and Ni Chonail, 2019).

7.3. Adapting Practice to an Insecure Private Rental Market

Having outlined participants' experiences of insecurity in the private rental market as well as the threat and actual experiences of homelessness, this section examines the practices participants developed in order to manage housing insecurity. Understanding the private rental market as a relational field (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992), this section aims to explore how participants navigated unequal landlord-tenant relationships in order to avoid tenancy termination. The section first details practices used by participants to essentially demonstrate participants' worthiness as tenants. This is followed by an examination of practices that are aimed at prioritising rental payments.

7.3.1. *Being a 'Good' Tenant*

Landlord-tenant relationships are based on hierarchical relationships characterised by hidden and invisible power dynamics (Chisholm et al., 2020). Participants frequently described a sense of intimidation and powerlessness in their dealings with landlords, which led some to adopt the stance of a cooperative and undemanding tenant – as they endeavoured to maintain a 'good', professional relationship with the landlord as a means of safeguarding their tenancy, even if this meant incurring a financial cost. Several, for example, stated that they avoided reporting malfunctioning equipment and, instead,

opted to replace faulty appliances at their own cost in an effort not to jeopardise the ‘good’ relationship with their landlord.

“If the Hoover is broken or something, I am going to buy it myself, I don’t ask because I am thinking if I am asking too much like this, maybe he [landlord] is going to say, ‘I’m going to sell’. Sometimes we solve the problem [ourselves]” (Nasrin, RP7).

“I would be extra cautious every time because we are in a situation where we don’t want to mess up anything [...] like the cooker is very slow, I think it is an old cooker, so, I could have asked for that to change but I decided not to. I bought a pressure cooker, so if I have to cook something quick, I will use that. So things like that, you know. I just want to have a good relationship with the landlord” (Abhik, RP9).

The practice of exercising caution and avoiding contact or interaction that could potentially displease the landlord was particularly pronounced in Mohammad’s case. Mohammad had lived for two years in the home of an Irish couple and, particularly during the early weeks of the tenancy, felt the need to be especially careful in his attempts to “be perfect”, even though his landlord had encouraged him to make himself feel at home.

“I was kind of worried to do anything wrong and that could be impolite in their culture [laughs], you know. So, I was careful of my movement and paid attention to all the details [laughs] just to be perfect and to do nothing wrong” (Mohammad, RP11).

This practice of exercising caution and being cooperative was closely linked to the fear or threat of losing the tenancy. While a majority of participants reported positive, professional relationships with their landlords, being a ‘good’ tenant did not protect them from receiving a notice to vacate their accommodation. Reza and Chantal’s husband, for example, had both used their practical skills to support their respective landlords in maintaining their own and their neighbours’ apartments by carrying out small repairs and/or ensuring the removal of communal rubbish bins. Despite such concerted efforts to provide practical supports to their landlords, both households had to vacate their apartments; Reza because of the sale of the property and Chantal’s family, due to exceeding the number of permissible property occupants outlined in the rental contract. However, while being a cooperative tenant did not prevent a notice of termination in these two cases, the practice of providing practical support to the landlord did nonetheless strengthen the tenant-landlord relationship. For example, a good relationship led Reza’s

landlady to support him in finding and securing new accommodation while Chantal's landlord agreed to extend the notice period several times so that the family did not have to access emergency homelessness accommodation.

Thus, while the practice of being an exceptionally 'good' and cooperative tenant may signal the hidden power hierarchy between tenant and landlord (Chisholm et al., 2020), it can also be viewed as an attempt to live up to the promises made during the housing search when participants emphasised their positive credentials and ability to be exceptional tenants to prospective landlords. Importantly, maintaining a good relationship with the landlord was a strategy developed to overcome feelings of powerlessness and insecurity (McKee et al., 2020). The practice was fuelled by the hope that these acts would be reciprocated one day, either by the landlord not selling the property or, at least, by him/her providing a greater degree of flexibility and support at the point of issuing a notice to vacate the property. While this practice can be understood as a hidden form of power through which landlords maintain control over participants (Chisholm et al., 2020), the tenant-landlord relationship can also be viewed as an opportunity to build a relationship or, more specifically, the development of 'vertical weak ties' (Ryan et al., 2008) with a person who is in a more advantageous position in the housing market and therefore has the capacity to provide access to social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Ryan et al., 2008).

7.3.2. Budgeting and Delaying Employment

Strict budgeting and the prioritisation of punctual rental payments emerged as other common practices, which also sometimes produced heightened financial stress (McKee et al., 2020). Prioritising rental payments was particularly challenging as most participants reported that they lived on very restricted budgets. While almost all relied on a combination of social welfare and housing assistance payments, their financial situations differed depending on the size of the household, whether they had additional income through part-time employment, and the extent to which they received financial support from family members living abroad.⁸⁰ Although the relevant local authority paid the rent directly to the landlord and participants' rent contribution was deducted from their

⁸⁰ While the majority of participants regularly transferred money to family members, three participants reported that they had received financial support from a family member(s) at some point since arriving in Ireland. Aleksander, for example, had received money from his parents to assist with the payment of his first rental deposit while Rasheed and Nora's family had received financial support from family to help with the purchase of a car.

welfare payments, most had to pay considerable monthly top-ups of up to several hundred euro directly to their landlord. Participants prioritised these top-ups above all other expenses in order to circumvent the risk of losing their hard-won tenancy.

“I am conscious of the fact that I have the responsibility of paying rent now, so whatever money I get, I basically just put it aside for rent, so I don’t run into a problem where I’d have to struggle with rent” (David, RP15).

“We have to skip parts from our daily life, saying this we don’t need but we have to afford this thing. So we prioritise, we balance, you have to balance this and this and priority is for the rent, you have to” (Sherko, RP3).

Prioritising rental payments also meant that participants frequently had to cut back on other expenses such as transport costs, with some participants choosing to cycle instead of using public transport and others deciding against purchasing a car; not buying (halal) meat; not buying new clothing; while one participant mentioned avoiding the use of paid childcare.⁸¹ Participants were very conscious about the exact price of groceries, which they compared across different stores. More onerous expense associated with, for example, buying furniture, a second-hand car or a winter coat, had to be saved for over many months while other aspirations such as purchasing a laptop, starting one’s own business or purchasing a house, were simply out of reach for the vast majority.

While all households paid rental top-ups, single adult households who relied entirely on welfare payments particularly struggled to make ends meet. Aleksander, for example, who was living alone and relied solely on a disability allowance, found it was challenging to survive on the money that remained after he paid the rental top-up.

“They don’t pay all the money by Dublin City Council, by HAP, you have to pay from your social welfare, from your disability allowance. It is not easy if you don’t have an additional job or part-time job or something. It is not easy to survive. Even with living alone” (Aleksander, RP6).

While Aleksander struggled to make ends meet, Busiswe, who had an additional income from a part-time job, stressed that she and her daughter were able to manage

⁸¹ None of the participants mentioned health costs (apart from dental visits) as an area where they had to save money: all, apart from Faiza, had a medical card which meant that they had access free GP and public hospital care.

because of this extra income: *“I can say, because I am working, I’m kind of able to manage with the little income that I have”* (Buiswe, RP19). Similarly, two-parent households who received higher welfare payments appeared to be able to manage better than single households, even without additional income from paid employment. Yet, Abhik pointed out that while his family was able to survive, the money was not sufficient to make any long-term financial plans: *“In order to survive and maintain a family it is good enough for us, but to think long-term, you know, I don’t think it is a very good sustainable income”* (Abhik, RP9).

Employment is clearly critical to the medium- and long-term financial situations of refugees. Two-parent family households, however, were particularly likely to comment that they would require at least two incomes to be able to manage financially without the support of welfare benefits, housing subsidy payments, and a range of means-tested support such as medical cards and back-to-school and fuel allowances. Nasrin, for example, explained that her husband was ready to start working but because they feared losing access to welfare benefits, he had delayed entry to the labour market until Nasrin was also employment-ready. Similarly, Nabil, who was in the process of making job applications, worried that upon securing employment, his family would be in a more disadvantaged situation financially because they may no longer be eligible for the HAP.

“My husband is ready to do some work but we can’t if he is just working, and we should pay rent as well, you know? Because if some people work in your family, all the Government fees are going to be stopped and you should pay all from your pocket. But if you are both working, that’s why I am studying, you know, to get a good job and he can start work as well” (Nasrin, RP7).

“It is challenging because, if my salary exceeded a specific number, they will stop the HAP when I’m working, which is 40’250 for my family size. [...] I don’t know why HAP is black or white. If you earn, for example, 39’000 you will get HAP” (Nabil, RP8).

Thus, participants who feared the loss of housing assistance and other welfare benefits delayed entry to the labour market until they felt confident that they would earn enough to cover their expenses or, alternatively, engaged in employment for a maximum of three days per week in order to maintain access to the jobseeker’s benefits and the HAP. Employment was therefore perceived by many to pose a risk to their housing security, which meant that only those who were mobile and willing to accept less secure housing situations were in a position to prioritise employment over housing. The practice of

delaying employment or only engaging in part-time employment in order to avoid the loss of welfare benefits curtailed the ability of many participants to improve their financial situations and work towards creating a financially sustainable future.

In conclusion, to avoid rent arrears and the associated risk of tenancy termination, participants prioritised paying the rent over other weekly expenses, with some households delaying entry to the labour market in order to ensure that they would be in a position to meet rental payments. These findings chimes with UK-based research that has demonstrated that prioritising housing costs can prevent refugee households from taking up low-paid jobs because of the risk of losing access to welfare (Netto, 2011a; Strang et al., 2018).

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined participants' experiences and perspectives on the transition from DP to housing. Two distinct housing journeys following the move from DP – *linear* and *turbulent*, respectively – were identified. A majority of participants embarked on *linear* housing journeys in securing accommodation in the private rental market. A smaller group followed *turbulent* housing journeys and had accessed a variety of insecure, temporary accommodations, largely through their social connections with co-ethnics, locals and/or family members (Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Kissoon, 2010; Teixeira, 2008). While single households prioritised moving out of DP quickly in the hope of accessing economic, educational and social opportunities, families prioritised the need to have and maintain stable housing situations and were, therefore, more likely to follow *linear* housing journeys in their attempts to maintain certainty and security for their children.

Moving from DP to housing signified a move between two distinct fields of housing and prompted a period during which participants had to adjust to the new reality of living in the private rental market; in other words, participants' habitus had to adapt to the newly encountered housing field (Bourdieu, 2000). In contrast to other low-income renters in the private rented sector (McKee et al., 2020), this study's participants associated entry to the private rented accommodation with regaining control over their lives and finding a sense of peace and normality. Yet, the sense of ontological security experienced by them as they transitioned from DP to housing (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Giddens, 1984) was soon undermined by the uncertainty of the private rental market and, in particular, the risk of homelessness (McKee et al., 2020). Housing insecurity therefore shaped

participants' future housing aspirations, although all hoped to achieve greater housing security, either in the form of homeownership or local authority housing.

Bourdieu (2000) posits that when encountering and experiencing a new field, agents' habitus gradually adapts to the rules underpinning the newly encountered field (Bourdieu, 2000). By understanding the private rental market as a relational field (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992), this chapter has demonstrated participants' efforts to develop practices and strategies in response to the unequal landlord-tenant relationships they encountered, in the hope of avoiding tenancy termination and homelessness. In doing so, very many endeavoured to present themselves as 'good' tenants, also prioritising rental payments, often through strict budgeting which they hoped would secure their tenancies in the longer term (McKee et al., 2020; Netto, 2011a; Strang et al., 2018). While these practices reflect the hidden power dynamics that exist between tenants and landlords (Chisholm et al., 2020), they sometimes provided avenues for participants to establish 'vertical weak ties' with landlords (Ryan et al., 2008), which could potentially act as a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The following, final findings chapter examines processes of home-making and participants' sense of belonging in an insecure private rental market.

8. Making a Home ‘Away from Home’

Having detailed participants’ experiences of and perspectives on the transition from DP to housing, this chapter delves deeper into their experiences of making a home in an insecure private rental market. Making a home and finding a sense of belonging has been identified as a key process in the settlement experiences of refugees (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Brun and Fábos, 2015; Fathi, 2022; O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). The chapter starts by examining the impact of living in an insecure private rental market on the processes of home-making and explores the meaning(s) that participants attached to home. The chapter then explores the role of social relations, specifically relationships with family, friends, and neighbours, in the process of making a home and considers how immigration policies, residential mobility and neighbourhood dynamics shaped refugees’ ability to build and maintain these relationships. The chapter concludes by examining the significance of having full access to social rights to the development of a sense of home.

8.1. Making a Home in an Insecure Private Rental Market

According to Boccagni (2017), the fundamental elements of feeling at home include feelings of personal safety, familiarity and control of one’s own space. While life in DP - characterised by tension, uncertainty and a lack of autonomy – represented a situation of ‘ontological homelessness’ (O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010), Chapter 7 detailed how participants found a renewed sense of peace, safety and autonomy after moving from DP to private rented accommodation. These three elements proved central to participants’ sense of feeling at home and were very evident throughout their accounts. For instance, Rose emphasised that feeling at peace and having the ability to meet her basic needs were crucial to feeling at home, while Busiswe explained that ‘home’ meant being able to live her life according to her values, culture and religion and, importantly, to feeling safe and having “peace of mind”.

“To be at home, for me, it’s just to have peace. To have peace and also to be able to access what you need for your survival and to be sure that, around you, everyone is safe, and they are also happy” (Rose, RP22).

“A home is a place where you can have your own values, it gives you that power to make decisions about your life and you are able to practise your religion and your culture [...] It is a place of safety, where you feel very safe because you have a home, you feel safe, you have peace of mind” (Busiswe, RP19).

Next to personal safety and control in one's own space, Boccagni (2017) highlights the significance of familiarity in developing a sense of home. Developing this sense of familiarity in a new neighbourhood or in new accommodation required time, as well as conscious thought and effort. Abeni commented that when she moved from DP to an apartment with her two children, she initially regretted the move and only with time and becoming familiar with her new surroundings, did her new accommodation begin to feel like home.

"At first I was saying, I think I shouldn't have gotten the place, I think I should go back to the [Direct Provision] hostel, you know, things like that. But I think the more I stay in the house the more it feels homely" (Abeni, RP17).

While Abeni's account illustrates the importance of time in becoming more familiar with a place, others told that decorating their rental accommodation and buying new furniture helped them to feel more at home. Participants put considerable effort into purchasing homewares and decorating their apartment or house according to their taste (Bourdieu, 1984). In Ireland, private rented accommodation is commonly furnished. While the furniture provided was often of low quality and not to the participants' taste, landlords usually allowed participants to gradually replace the existing furniture. Yohana, for example, did not like the furnishings of the small studio apartment she rented and, by buying her own furniture, was able to make the place feel like her own.

"I asked him [the landlord], do you mind if we take out this chair because I don't like it, I bought a couch from a second-hand shop which is close to my house [...] I bought most of the things by myself, I changed the place how I wanted, so he never complained anything, I am happy there" (Yohana, RP4)

While decorating and buying new furniture supported participants in feeling at home, adequate housing conditions have also been shown to be essential to refugees' sense of home and belonging (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). Yet, several participants lived in poor-quality accommodation, which acted as a barrier to feeling at home. Rose, for example, struggled to feel at home in the place where she lived. She explained that living in a small, damp apartment right next to a busy street was not conducive to feeling at home and that she aspired to have a garden that would allow her to relax and enjoy the outdoors.

“Sometimes, I would just love to step out, you know when you are living in a house, you just step out of the door to just catch that [breathes in] fresh breath, I don’t have that luxury ” (Rose, RP21).

While housing quality, in some instances, impacted participants' ability to feel at home, the uncertainty of renting in the private rental market also affected their sense of home. Abhik told that he deliberately avoided feeling at home in the place he and his family rented because he anticipated having to move at some point in the future and, in all likelihood, at short notice. Uncertainty related to insecurity of tenure also affected Reza, who had invested considerable time in making his place a home and building relationships with neighbours. However, since leaving DP ten years earlier, he had been forced to move several times after receiving notice to quit, which meant that he had to constantly vacate familiar properties and neighbourhoods where he had endeavoured to make a home.

“There is extra carefulness that works in my mind, we try not to get attached to something that we do not have full control of. So if we feel we don’t have full control over our future in this home, so we don’t like to feel this is actually a home, because if we have to leave then it will be difficult” (Abhik, RP9).

“Now I am fifty-three years old, one year [I have to move to] another house, then another house. Sometimes I like to buy a nice TV, sometimes a wardrobe, every time it goes to rubbish, leaving the people, change house. We have this problem, big problem, this country with housing” (Reza, RP2).

Both accounts demonstrate that the continued insecurity experienced by participants while renting in the private rental market acted as an impediment to making a home.

To summarise, among the study’s participants, feeling at home was associated with feeling safe and at peace and with having greater control – the precise opposite of life in DP, which was characterised by frequent tensions, feelings of insecurity and the loss of control. While the move from DP to housing increased feelings of personal safety and control, becoming familiar with the new environment took time (Boccagni, 2017). Decorating and arranging their accommodation according to their own taste allowed participants to become familiar with their new place (Boccagni, 2017) and enabled them to express their distinct personal tastes, lifestyles and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, the participants' accounts also strongly suggest that the uncertainty of the private rental market, particularly in relation to insecurity of tenure, undermined their attempts to make a home (McKee et al., 2020).

8.2. Home Making through Social Relations

Faced with this ongoing uncertainty, social connections, particularly close family ties, were especially important to feeling at home (Boccagni, 2017; Brun and Fábos, 2015; Fathi, 2022). Without the certainty of a long-term place of residence, a small number of participants explained that being with their family was what meant being at home. For instance, Abhik explained that, since his arrival in Ireland, frequent moves meant that home was not a physical space but, rather, the presence of his family.

“When I’m with my wife and my daughter this is my home because we have changed so many places. So we start building our homes within ourselves rather than in a physical home, you know. So, I do feel home when I’m with my family and this is a home” (Abhik, RP9).

The importance of family to feeling at home meant that some who were separated from their families or who did not have a partner/spouse or children struggled to feel at home. This theme was particularly prominent in the narratives of participants aged in their 30s or above. Reza, who was in his early fifties and without any close family ties, reported feeling lonely in his studio apartment and only experienced a sense of home and belonging when he spent time with two friends who he met in DP and who had welcomed him into their families: *“I spend my time with friends because I feel alone, I don’t feel at home. I meet with friends so that I can have some social life” (Reza, RP2).* For Faiza, who was in her 30s, not being married and not having children made it difficult to become part of the wider Libyan community in Ireland, which in turn constrained her ability to feel at home.

“What makes it hard here to feel at home is, maybe, because I am not married and I don’t have kids, because I am alone, maybe because I am not in the community very well. Like the Libyan or the Arab community in general, it’s families, so I am not into them that much, so that’s why I don’t feel like ‘home’, that I am happy here. I’m not feeling home until I have friends, and I have family here, you know” (Faiza, RP18).

Reza’s and Faiza’s accounts draw attention to the importance of close ties to family and friends to feeling a sense of home in Ireland. Yet, while social relations have been demonstrated to play an important role in making a home (Boccagni, 2017; Brun and

Fábos, 2015; Fathi, 2022; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014), participants experienced various challenges in maintaining and building these relationships. The following sections explore the barriers participants experienced when attempting to make a home through social relationships and interactions.

8.2.1. *Barriers to Family Reunification*

Family networks and their relational features have been demonstrated to play an important role in bolstering emotional well-being and supporting sense of belonging (Fathi, 2022; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). Having fled their home countries, all participants had experienced some degree of physical separation from loved ones, with ten having arrived alone and without access to any personal social networks in Ireland. While rights to family reunification meant that some could reunite with family members once they were granted refugee status, these rights became significantly curtailed following the introduction of the International Protection Act in 2017, which only allows reunification with immediate family members such as spouses and underage⁸² children. Only one participant, Rose, had been successfully reunited with her husband at the time of the interview.

Those participants whose circumstances met the criteria for family reunification became eligible to submit an application once they received either full refugee or subsidiary protection. At the time of collecting data, five participants had pending applications for family reunification, with two having waited for more than 12 months for the outcome of their application, thereby further prolonging their separation from family members. This separation was particularly difficult when young children were involved, as was the case for Rasheed and Nauman, who both had three children under the age of 10 years and who struggled to maintain relationships with them through long-distance video calls. While technology was indispensable to having and sustaining relationships with their children, Nauman, who had been separated from his family for five years, explained that it could not replace the physical element that is so central to a parent-child relationship.

⁸² A child had to be under the age of 18 years at the time of submitting the initial application for international protection.

“When I left my country the youngest one, she was just five months old, and now she goes to school, she talks and she had not had the feeling like this [touching his hand]. Yeah, it is painful” (Nauman, RP10).

Similar to Nauman, during a Go-Along, Rasheed, spoke about the emotional turmoil he felt in anticipation of his family’s arrival after five years of separation.

Case Study 5 Go-Along with Rasheed

The Go-Along with Rasheed in the summer of 2021 took place in a park in Dublin's North inner-city, which is one of Dublin’s most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. At that time, Rasheed was renting a room in a rental property that he shared with three others and, because of the lack of space in the property, spent most of his time in libraries and nearby parks. When we sat on a park bench, Rasheed talked about arranging travel documents and flights for his family, who had recently been approved for family reunification. This administrative task, combined with the demands of his new job and the emotional turmoil of meeting his family after five years of separation, placed him under considerable strain.

“It’s a bit hard [to start a new job], because I need time now to arrange myself and to arrange everything [for when my family arrives]. It’s difficult because it has been a long time. Five years and I don’t know how to manage when they will be here”.

In addition, Rasheed did not know where his family would stay once they arrived in Ireland, which made it extremely difficult for him to prepare for their arrival: *“If I would have a house, I would buy everything, but now, because of the house, I can’t buy anything”*. To prepare his children ahead of the impending move, Rasheed explained that he showed them the park’s playground during video calls: *“[I] turn the camera on and tell my children, look! Later you come here and play with the children there”*. While he was thankful that new technologies such as WhatsApp allowed him to stay in regular contact with his family, he felt strongly that meeting his family after five years of separation would essentially mean getting to know them anew:

“I have almost forgotten everything [about my family], because [it has been] five years and, you know, a person changes. People change and that’s why. That is a

bit difficult, believe me. Everything would be a bit new for me. My wife, my children, everything”.

Rasheed’s account demonstrates that family reunification was a highly emotional process that was further complicated by the absence of a family home and the significant administrative burden participants experienced ahead of the arrival of their family.

Apart from the lengthy application processing times, there were additional hurdles associated with achieving family reunification, including the task of arranging visas and making travel arrangements. Peter, for example, who had applied for reunification with his two teenage children, had been asked to procure supporting documents from the same government from which he had fled to substantiate his application, which was extremely challenging.

“It’s ridiculous because if you are running away for your safety and there is a person asking you that you must produce this document and the only person who can give you the document is the one who is chasing you” (Peter, RP22).

For participants, this period of separation and waiting for a response to their application was extremely stressful, particularly if their family was at risk of harm, as was the case for Mohammad’s family. While Mohammad waited for the Irish government to approve his reunification application, his family continued to live in a Syrian city that was partly destroyed by the war, with limited their access to food, education and healthcare. At the time of the interview, Mohammad was very worried about his family’s situation and the associated stress was having significant negative impacts on his mental health.

“My family is still waiting for an approval, for just a response from the Government. So that’s why, it’s kind of hard for me. And this makes me feel less energetic with my study, with my dealing with people, makes me depressed sometimes” (Mohammad, RP11).

While applying for family reunification was stressful, the prospect of reuniting with family members meant that participants felt one step closer to making Ireland their home. However, not all participants were eligible for family reunification because the family members with whom they had hoped to reunite – whether siblings, parents or adult

children – did not fit the criteria⁸³ for family reunification. This was particularly difficult in situations where siblings and parents continued to live in situations of conflict and extreme poverty and with limited access to education, electricity, food and medicine, which placed them at high risk of suffering and harm (Nickerson et al., 2010).

While participants maintained regular contact with family members by, for example, phoning their parent(s), children or siblings regularly – with a majority of participants also providing financial support to their family – the sense of loss associated with their physical absence was very evident in many accounts. Abhik, for example, explained that he worried about his daughter growing up without the support of the extended family network: *“She grows up without seeing her grandparents, niece, uncles, cousins”* (Abhik, RP9). The feelings of loss associated with the absence of extended family members was also very apparent during the Go-Along with Malika: As we sat at her kitchen table, Malika explained that she had lived with her family as part of a large extended family household in a Syrian city, where her children grew up alongside their cousins and where she prepared food alongside the other mothers in the household. Malika called her family every day at exactly the same time in her efforts to maintain her family relationships.

A small number of participants had considered applying for ‘join family’ visa to enable a family member(s) who did not qualify for family reunification to visit them in Ireland. However, these ‘join family’ visas for relatives from non-EU countries require proof of sufficient funds, which meant that this was not an option for the vast majority of participants. For young mothers, such as Nasrin and Abeni, visits from their mothers were felt to be particularly important because of the practical and emotional support they could provide to them following the birth of their children. Abeni’s mother lived in Italy and was able to visit from time to time to support her. However, Nasrin, who had planned to invite her mother to Ireland for a period three months to support her following the birth of her second child, did not have sufficient funds to arrange a visa for her mother, who continued to live in Iraq, leaving her without support of this nature.

“I’ve tried to [apply for a visa] for my mum, but it was hard, because, even though I’ve filled in the form, it says my mum needs to have 40’000 euro in the bank [laughs] we don’t even have a bank system in my country. And here, for example, I have to

⁸³ The International Protection Act (2015) limits the right to family reunification to immediate family members such as spouses and underage children. People receiving refugee status or subsidiary protection can apply for family reunification within 12 months of receiving status.

work, I have to have more than 35'000 in my bank and you have to have space, for example, one additional bedroom and I just stopped“ (Nasrin, RP7).

Consequently, for most, meeting family members outside of Ireland was often the only possible way they could meet: while participants were not permitted to leave the country during the asylum process, travel arrangements were usually made by them shortly after they gained status in order to finally meet with loved ones after a lengthy period of separation. These meetings usually took place in a third country since the travel documents⁸⁴ issued to refugees did not always permit them to return to their country of origin and it very often not, in any case, safe for them to do so. However, a small number of participants who had successfully secured Irish citizenship and, thereby, the right to travel more freely, were able to travel to their home countries to reconnect with family members.

In summary, family was critically important to participants' sense of home and their ability to feel at home (Fathi, 2022; Simich et al., 2010). Yet, as a direct consequence of displacement, refugees often experienced long periods of separation from their children, spouses, parents, siblings and extended family members. In most EU countries, refugees' right to family reunification is significantly constrained by asylum and immigration policies that limit their access to these transnational support networks and ultimately negatively impact their sense of belonging and mental well-being (Bonizzoni and Belloni, 2023; Fathi, 2022; Löbel, 2020; Simich et al., 2010). While family reunification offered some participants the opportunity to reunite with family, the process placed considerable administrative and emotional burdens on participants. Indeed, Smith et al. (2023, p.12) have labelled the Irish government's approach to family reunification as 'careless hospitality', owing to the limited supports made available to refugees during this critical period. A Canadian study of Sudanese refugees' experiences of resettlement found that the absence of extended family networks and the support that they provide hinder them from developing a sense of home (Simich et al., 2010). Participants' accounts in the current research similarly demonstrate that participants' restricted access to family reunification and to 'join family' visas for members of extended family networks meant that their access to these transnational support networks was highly constrained.

⁸⁴ A travel document is an official document that assists people with refugee status to travel outside of Ireland.

8.2.2. *Building and Maintaining Friendships*

Participants' lack of family connections in Ireland meant that building and maintaining strong friendships became an integral part of making a home. Since arriving in Ireland, many had established friendships in a variety of settings through a range of activities such as participating in the arts, music or sports and, while living in DP, when taking English language classes, volunteering, attending local events or church; or through social media, ethnic networks, befriending projects and chance encounters in public spaces. These friendships provided important emotional and practical support and also helped to engender a sense of belonging. Faiza explained that she made friends through her advocacy work on human rights while Yonas had met his friends, who later became his flatmates, through sports activities organised by a local NGO.

"Once [I was] sorted with the house and with the job, once I had rented a place, I started to find my feet, I started to look for organisations and centres to volunteer and I was really happy, like, building up my network with a common purpose" (Faiza, RP18).

"It is very nice. I knew them [flatmates] before I started renting. All of them have hobbies, they climb, and do sports. They have been together since college and you end up being part of it. [It is] like a bond" (Yonas, RP1).

A number of participants explained that they had been able to form friendships which, over time, became family-like. For instance, David had formed a close bond with a group of people who resided in the DP centre, who he now considered to be "like family". Mohammad, on the other hand, had lived for two years with an Irish host family who he said had become "a second family" and with whom he maintained contact subsequent to moving to another accommodation.

"[After moving to a new DP centre] I met the best people I have ever met since I came to Ireland, you know. People that at the moment are no longer friends but are like family" (David, RP15).

"They are a very nice family, like. And I consider them as a family, a second family for me, like here, you know, outside of home like, you know. Yeah, away from home" (Mohammad, RP11).

Participants' place of residence and their friendships were often strongly intertwined because living in close proximity to each other was often a prerequisite to meeting and maintaining friendships. While some participants managed to secure accommodation close to their social networks, participants who had to expand their housing search radius in order to find affordable accommodation frequently lived a considerable distance from their established social networks. Table 8 presents the movements of the study's participants from DP to housing, demonstrating that a majority either remained in Dublin after gaining status or moved to Dublin from DP centres located in cities, villages or towns across the country. No participant reported moving out of Dublin to another geographical region or location after gaining status. While all participants who moved to private rented accommodation in Dublin lived initially within walking distance of the city centre, three of the fourteen participants moved to suburban areas at a later stage of their housing journeys to accommodate their growing families.

Table 8 Geographical Housing Journeys from DP to Housing

Geographical Housing Journeys	Number of Households
Remaining in Dublin	6
Moving to Dublin (from a city, a town or a rural area)	8
Moving to Town (from a city, a town or a rural area)	5
Moving to a Rural area (from a town or a rural area)	2
Total	21*

*One participant had not moved out of DP by the time of the interview.

**City (>50,000 inhabitants); Town (1,500-49,999 inhabitants); and village (<1,500 inhabitants)

Moves to the capital city, Dublin, were associated with participants' desire to avail of enhanced educational and employment opportunities, as well as improved access to social networks. In five out of seven cases, moves to towns or rural areas occurred as a direct consequence of not being able to secure housing in their preferred urban locations. Additionally, while those participants who moved to Dublin were households without children at the time of this initial move, with just one exception, those who moved to towns or rural areas were usually families. This suggests that childless households were more mobile, which allowed them to move to urban locations that offered increased access to social, economic and cultural capital. Family households, on the other hand, were more

likely to move to towns or rural areas, echoing the findings of research on ‘Generation Rent’ and housing precarity in Ireland, which suggest that “lower-income tenants, and those seeking larger family homes, are pushed to suburban neighbourhoods or far-flung commuter towns” (Waldron, 2023, p. 192).

Moves from DP to housing, as well as moves within the private rental market, disrupted existing social networks, with half of the study’s participants reporting that their geographical distance from established social networks meant that maintaining social relationships was difficult, which sometimes produced feelings of isolation and loneliness. Faiza, for example, had moved to a suburban area of Dublin that was a significant distance from her ethnic community and subsequently had to travel a considerable distance by car in order to meet with her friends.

“I think people who are living in [names of two suburban areas] are very lucky because they are close to each other, they can see each other every week [...] but there are not many people in [name of neighbourhood] or in town, it is not easy to meet” (Faiza, RP18).

The concept of spatial capital is a useful tool with which to more fully understand how the place of residence impacts refugees’ ability to maintain friendships. A person’s spatial capital is shaped by their access to transportation, their ability to effectively utilise various transportation options, and the strategies they employ to leverage the available transport options and their competencies (Kaufmann et al., 2004; R  rat and Lees, 2011). In terms of access, in Ireland, there is a heavy reliance on the use of private cars, particularly in rural areas where there are generally only very limited public transport options available. Access to a car therefore represents an important form of spatial capital. Rafiq, who lived in a rural village and who was a car owner, relied solely on his car for transport while his wife, who could not drive, depended heavily on him for transport. Rafiq explained that this became a significant problem after their move from a bustling town to a small rural village, which meant that his wife was solely dependent on him for transport and also led to her feeling isolated and depressed.

“Sometimes she [my wife] feels depressed because she has no friends because she is living in a very faraway place. If she would come here [referring to town] she could go to places to visit herself, but there no, she cannot” (Rafiq, RP5).

In seven out of the nine households that owned a car, the vehicle was driven by a male member of the household, which meant that women relied on a male relative (husband or son) for transport, also suggesting that women had considerably less spatial capital. The matter of car ownership affected not only those households living in rural areas but also those in suburban areas with limited public transport connections. While this lack of spatial capital had a negative impact on women's social networks, it also affected other household activities. Nasrin, for example, who lived in a suburban area close to Dublin, found her long daily commute by public transport to her place of study exhausting. She depended heavily on her husband in order to complete a range of everyday activities such as grocery shopping or going to the gym: *"I don't drive actually. My husband, he is like a taxi man"* (Nasrin, RP7). Thus, living in rural and suburban areas with limited public transport options particularly affected women and, in many cases, meant that their ability to engage in everyday duties and/or to socialise with friends was highly constrained.

In addition to the place of residence and related access to transport options, the housing situation itself impacted participants' ability to maintain friendships. The vast majority of participants identified inviting friends to their homes as integral to maintaining friendships. As documented in Chapter 7, participants' housing journeys included a whole range of housing situations, including living in DP, temporary accommodation or emergency homelessness accommodation, and sharing with others, which meant that all experienced periods when they did not have a place of residence where they could invite friends. Nauman, who lived in a small studio apartment, explained that as a consequence of not having a home since arriving in Ireland, he now had a long list of friends who he intended to invite upon securing stable accommodation for himself and his family: *"I have a long list of people whom I have made the promise that I will invite them [listing six names], so many people, there is a long list"* (Nauman, RP10). The importance of hosting people and sharing food was evident during both the interviews and the Go-Alongs, as well as on occasions when participants invited the researcher to share a meal in their home or in a restaurant, which occurred in the case of six of the Go-Along encounters. The inability to prepare food while living in DP was noted time and again as particularly challenging by participants and the move out of DP finally permitted them to engage in a much-valued activity regarded by them as integral to home-making, fostering friendships and feeling at home.

Overall, the findings suggest that in the absence of family, friendships became essential to achieving a sense of belonging. Some participants expressed that their friends

had become 'like family,' resembling the concept of 'chosen families' commonly found within LGBTQ+ communities. These 'chosen families' are distinguished by strong emotional bonds that foster a profound sense of belonging. However, in contrast to the 'chosen families' within the LGBTQ+ community, refugees form these new bonds not in response to rejection or lack of understanding from their biological families, but rather due to the absence of their extended family networks. Yet, participants' ability to maintain social connections such as friendships depended heavily on the quality and place of their accommodation. This section has shown that childless households were more mobile and therefore more likely to move to urban areas where they were in closer proximity to opportunities that might enhance their access to economic, cultural and social capital (Bridge, 2006; Huang et al., 2018), with direct consequences for their social networks. While housing quality and spatial capital facilitated social interactions and helped participants to maintain relationships, housing situations also acted as a barrier to hosting friends and nurturing friendships (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Rérat and Lees, 2011). Finally, the findings presented in this section also signal gender-based disparities in the acquisition of spatial capital, demonstrating that women had less access to spatial capital and were, therefore, more constrained in maintaining relationships (Rérat and Lees, 2011).

8.2.3. *Fostering Neighbourhood Connections*

While the previous section examined the impact of the quality and location of housing on the maintenance of friendships, this section turns to local communities and the opportunities they presented to form new connections. In line with Ager and Strang's (2008) observation that integration is more likely to happen in stable communities, participants who had been living for extended periods in the same, stable neighbourhood were more likely to report the ability to build strong local networks with neighbours and others in the community. Nasrin, for example, who had lived in the same neighbourhood for five years, explained that she had been able to build strong relationships with her neighbours, on whom she could depend should an emergency arise. She recalled a particularly difficult period when she was admitted to the hospital for surgery and worried about who would take care of her children. The strong support of her neighbours provided her with a sense of safety, which was particularly important in the absence of her family.

"I had stones in my gall bladder and I didn't know who can mind my children. We have a neighbour and they are Irish and they mind them, and they get them from school [...] if you have a good neighbour you feel safe, you know, particularly if you

have children, you know, like friends. [...] It's good, you know, because we don't have real family here, you know, it's good to have [that support]" (Nasrin, RP7).

While Nasrin had been able to build a strong local network over time, participants who lived in neighbourhoods for a shorter period reported noticeably fewer interactions or connections with their neighbours. Notably, not all neighbourhoods offered the same opportunities to make connections (Hebbani et al., 2018; Spicer, 2008): for example, several participants commented that they lived in 'quiet' neighbourhoods where there was little interaction with others and neighbours were, in any case, busy with their own lives, which made it difficult to establish connections.

"In terms of the area, I think it's an area with a lot of working-class people, they are mostly busy working, so it hard to make connections with others. So we kind of stay with our old connections" (Abhik, RP9).

"[Neighbourhood name] is very quiet, it's one of the posh areas here. You know, it's a compound with gates, secure, very quiet [...] people, they don't really speak to one another, mostly old people, you know, not as friendly, and everyone stays indoors, by their own, you wouldn't make friends with neighbours" (Faiza, RP18).

While these 'quiet' neighbourhoods offered participants privacy, they also restricted opportunities to building relationships with neighbours and negatively impacted refugees' sense of belonging (Hebbani et al., 2018). A small number of participants had also experienced overt racism in their neighbourhoods, with four reporting incidents of harassment from neighbours (Spicer, 2008). Malika and her family, for example, who had been allocated local authority housing in a rural village, had experienced a mixed introduction to the neighbourhood: while they were welcomed by local volunteers who supported them in getting to know the locality, their house was targeted by children shortly after they moved in.

"After we came here, to this house, there were some children, they threw some eggs and pushed the window and the wall outside [from our house]. After that, I looked for them and said, 'Hello, how are you?'. I don't speak to them about this" (Malika, RP13).

Malika suspected that the children were misinformed: "Maybe, they saw some news on the TV, and they got a bad idea from us"; and continued to talk to the children in the

hope that this would allow them to get to know her. While Malika felt confident to address the incident in this way, participants were far more concerned when the racialised harassment was targeted directly towards their children. Rafiq's oldest son, for example, had been excluded by his peers from activities such as playing soccer after the family moved to a rural village where the vast majority of the residents were White Irish, prompting his son to stop speaking and to struggle to get to sleep.

"He has it very difficult, actually, because he gets bullied now. Children in the village are mostly Irish. Multicultural background children are not available there. In his class, he is the only one from abroad. So, children don't accept him" (Rafiq, RP5).

Grace's children were left deeply disturbed after their neighbour's children threatened to inflict physical harm on them and then proceeded to engage in disrespectful behaviour.

"When they went out, they had a few balloons and then those kids came, they wanted to take the balloons away from them, they ran back inside the house, the kids told them that they wanted to shoot them and they started peeing in front of them. So after that, they were terrified of going outside" (Grace, RP16).

Following the threat of physical harm, Grace and her children initially left their home *only* when necessary. However, both of her children subsequently joined local soccer clubs and gradually started to make friends with children in the neighbourhood. While Grace's children succeeded in building neighbourhood connections in time, other participants focused on building connections outside their neighbourhood. Where quiet or, in some cases hostile, neighbourhoods offered limited opportunities for connection, places outside the immediate neighbourhood became more important to feeling acceptance. This became particularly evident during the Go-Along with Malika: despite having limited opportunities to connect with others in her immediate neighbourhood, Malika succeeded in creating a strong network, consisting mainly of co-ethnic ties, that spanned a wider geographical area.

Case Study 6 Go-Along with Malika

The Go-Along with Malika took place on a summer's day in July 2021. Malika invited me to spend the entire day with her family. Our activities included sitting and talking at her home, visiting various scenic spots, grocery shopping, and paying a visit to a family

friend. Due to Malika's considerable knee pain, most of our journeys were undertaken by car, with either her husband or son driving.

Malika's family had arrived in Ireland through the Greece Relocation scheme. She explained that this program led to her forming close connections among the families and individuals while living together in DP. However, once granted refugee status, most households were allocated housing in three locations across Ireland. In contrast, Malika's family was allocated local authority housing in a small village in another county.

As this juncture, Malika and her family now lived a considerable distance from their pre-existing social networks and had to start anew in building local connections. Initially, their new neighbourhood seemed unwelcoming and children had thrown eggs at their home. Fortunately, these acts of intimidation did not persist and the family subsequently experienced the area as pleasant but with limited opportunities for forming connections.

Despite these initial challenges, it became evident during the Go-Along that Malika had succeeded in building and maintaining strong networks that extended beyond the immediate neighbourhood. For instance, she had established connections with teachers and fellow students at the English school she attended, which she pointed out during our drive through the nearby town. Additionally, when we stopped at a local store, Malika also purchased groceries for a Syrian friend. Later in the afternoon, we visited another Syrian family friend who was living alone and who appreciated the emotional and practical assistance provided by Malika's family, such as her son helping her to use her smartphone. In addition to the connections Malika had formed across a considerable geographical area, she also made a concerted effort to maintain contact with the Syrian community she had met through the Greece Relocation scheme, explaining that she had plans to visit them soon.

The Go-Along with Malika demonstrated that despite having limited opportunities to form social connections in her immediate neighbourhood, she did find ways to build social networks, often with co-ethnics, in nearby localities.

While Malika succeeded in building strong social networks with co-ethnics outside of her immediate neighbourhood, ethnically diverse neighbourhoods have been shown to offer more opportunities to such connections locally (Bynner, 2019; Easthope et al., 2018; Levine-Rasky, 2016; Netto, 2011b; Spicer, 2008). Yet, participants in this research did not

share precisely the same perspectives on what constituted a ‘good’ or preferred neighbourhood. While Sherko and Nasrin valued the ethnically diverse character of their neighbourhood, Abeni deliberately sought accommodation in White neighbourhoods.

“[The neighbourhood is] very quiet, very peaceful, it is multicultural, it is an apartment, big apartment, lots of different international people live there, very quiet, no trouble [...] I like that part, all the kids meet each other outside the apartments for playing. My son is happy, as long as my son is happy, I’m happy” (Sherko, RP3).

“We preferred Dublin because it’s a big city, actually, you know, for foreign people” (Nasrin, RP7).

“Where I am, honestly, I only met one Black person since I moved to this neighbourhood. There are White people all around me and I think I like it because it is quiet. They are actually elderly people. Being around Black people, they are just nosey, they want to know what’s going on in your house and all, so I didn’t want that” (Abeni, RP17).

The findings presented in this section suggest that neighbourhoods can play an important role in facilitating social connections. Perhaps not surprisingly, participants who had lived in their neighbourhood for several years were more likely to have built strong ties with neighbours, echoing Putnam’s (1993) observation that stable communities offer more access to social capital. Yet, while some neighbourhoods provided participants and their families with opportunities to build strong connections, others were less welcoming. Similar to Hebbani et al. (2018) study, which examined the neighbourhood experiences of refugees in Australia, life in a ‘quiet’ neighbourhood may mean living with “mainstream suburban residential norms that emphasize excessive privacy and ‘non-interference” (p. 97), which can in turn act as a barrier to building relationships with neighbours. While research from Canada, Australia and the UK has shown that ethnically diverse neighbourhoods can offer greater opportunities for refugees to connect within and across ethnic groups (Bynner, 2019; Easthope et al., 2018; Levine-Rasky, 2016; Netto, 2011b; Spicer, 2008), a small number of participants in this current research articulated a preference to live in White neighbourhoods because they were perceived as offering more privacy. This study’s participants have also experienced racialised harassment within their neighbourhoods. Yet, in contrast to a number of UK-based and Canadian studies, which have shown that refugee households often react to experiences of racialised harassment

and abuse by restricting their children's movements in order to protect them (Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Spicer, 2008), participants in this study responded somewhat differently and continued to make efforts to connect with people in their communities.

8.2.4. *Finding a Sense of Belonging*

The previous sections have highlighted the importance of family, friends and neighbours in participants' everyday lives, also demonstrating that these relationships were shaped by their housing situations and the neighbourhoods where they lived. This section moves beyond looking at individual connections and neighbourhoods and widens the lens to examine the meanings participants attached to being part of Irish society.

A strong thread to emerge from participants' accounts of being and feeling part of an Irish community was the perceived importance of mutual support, which included experiences of support from Irish people at different stages of their journeys and the emphasis placed by participants on 'giving back' to Irish society. Several commented on the kindness of people in their communities, which was depicted as central to them feeling welcome.

"It was really surprising to me, like, to see Irish families welcoming refugees from other countries and other cultures, other religions, like completely another kind of personality to live with them" (Mohammad, RP11).

"I prefer social relations [...] I found it here in Ireland. [...] If they feel that you need help, they will give you a hand" (Rasheed, RP12).

"Here people help you with all their hearts" (Nora, RP14).

While feeling welcomed and receiving support from various people along their settlement journeys in Ireland was clearly valued, participants also frequently emphasised the importance of making a contribution to Irish society. Volunteering or becoming an advocate for others were perceived as ways of 'giving back' and were also viewed as potential avenues towards better integration and an enhanced sense of belonging. For example, Nauman and Faiza, who were both involved in advocacy work, stressed the importance of activism and helping others to become part of the community.

"Being a citizen of this beautiful country, it is my responsibility to play my role, to develop the system" (Nauman, RP10).

“When you work and support your community and help others, when you make like, community, make friends, and when you contribute to society. Yeah, I think this is integration” (Faiza, RP18).

While many participants found Irish people to be generally open and helpful, there were others who reported opposing experiences. Chantal, for example, characterised Irish society as relatively insular and closed, which led her to struggle to feel at home. Similarly, David found it difficult to make connections because of the close-knit nature of the peer and social networks he encountered since arriving in Ireland.

“[People in Ireland] They are a little bit closed, it's just you have to know how to approach them. That does not mean that they are bad, but they are not used to it, you see, yeah. I think Ireland is among the countries that offer itself to foreigners only recently, also Africans, it has not been much time, maybe in the future [they will be more open]” (Chantal, RP20).

“Everybody sort of knows everybody, everybody has a connection somewhere [...] If you're not part of a certain circle you can't just go and be friendly with somebody, you have to know them properly before you guys can be friends, you know. But, whereas, where I am coming from, you can easily just walk up to somebody and just start talking to them, you know, and you guys just relate” (David, RP15).

In addition to this perceived closeness of Irish society, a number of participants also reported instances of racialised abuse in public spaces such as on their way to the mosque or in health care settings. Rasheed had regularly experienced verbal abuse from one individual who lived opposite the mosque he attended for worship, as did other mosque-goers, while Nabil's wife had experienced racialised harassment from a nurse after giving birth when she requested a level of privacy to allow her to remove her hijab.

“They shout at you, they treat you like they are thinking highly or something like that about themselves, yeah, something like that, but they cannot do anything with you” (Rasheed, RP12).

“I told her, please close [the curtains], because I want to sleep, I am tired, I want to remove my hijab. She told, ‘No, no, no, open’. I close, she opened [chuckles], I closed, she opened. I am feeling stressed because, you know, it's the first day, I want to rest” (Nabil's wife, RP8).

Apart from Abeni and Nauman, who emphasised that they had not experienced racism in Ireland, participants from African Muslim communities had all experienced some form of racialised harassment or exclusion at some stage. In contrast, the two White European participants, as well as the three Kurdish participants, did not report experiences of racism, suggesting that religion and/or race play a significant role in how Irish society was experienced by the study's participants.

In summary, for many participants, becoming part of Irish society was rooted in the practice of reciprocity and mutual support. This practice of mutual support echoes conceptualisations of integration which define integration as a two-way process (Ager and Strang, 2008). Yet, while participants described being welcomed in Ireland and told of participating in the civic life of the community, these experiences of inclusion were, at times, undermined by experiences of exclusion and racism, in turn challenging participants' sense of belonging (Brun and Fábos, 2015).

8.3. The Importance of Rights when Making a Home

The significance of finding a sense of feeling at home in situations of displacement (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Brun and Fábos, 2015; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010) was evident in many accounts. Several participants remarked that not being in a position to return to their home countries made it even more pressing to make Ireland their home (Fathi, 2022). Faiza emphasised that, rather than continuing to view her country of origin as home, she needed to focus on making a new home in a place where she felt safe, has rights, and can work and earn a living. Rasheed similarly explained that not being able to return to his country of origin made the task of building a new home more urgent and also felt that gaining Irish citizenship would also be important to feeling at home in Ireland.

"I don't want to believe that home is where I grew up, because it's going to make living here difficult, so I think where I have work, income, safety, where I have rights, like, higher living standard, I think, yeah [...] I don't want to be saying home is in Libya with my family, because maybe I wouldn't go back" (Faiza, RP18).

"I lost my country and I need to feel that I would belong to a place and I love Ireland, and that's why. I would like to get Irish citizenship; with Irish citizenship you feel you are at home. Because now, I have no place, I cannot go back to my country, unfortunately" (Rasheed, RP12).

Rasheed and Faiza's accounts demonstrate that by not being able to return to their home countries, making a home in Ireland became even more significant (Fathi, 2022). Both participants also stressed the importance of having (citizenship) rights to feel at home in Ireland.

While participants identified various barriers to feeling a sense of belonging in Ireland, a majority intended to make Ireland their home. When asked about whether they felt at home in Ireland, many were pragmatic in their responses, comparing Ireland with the situation in their home countries and outlining the reasons why they were not in a position to return. Participants very often drew attention to the safety that living in Ireland offered, their appreciation of the quality of education and healthcare available, and their wish for their children to grow up in a better place.

"I'm not thinking of going back to Syria, especially because this criminal regime is still there. And I'm thinking of bringing my family here to let my family settle here as well and have a home here as well. The main reason is my sisters, just to get a better education for them than in Syria" (Mohammad, RP11).

"When I see the big difference with my country like, you know, Government, politics and even quality of food, of education, that's the main thing, this is all better and different, I think I like it here better than [laughs] of course, you miss your family and mum but it's your life, you know. Particularly if you have children, because really I want my children to grow up in a good country" (Nasrin, RP7).

In brief, the vast majority of participants intended to make Ireland their home, not least because a safe return to their country of origin was simply not plausible. Similar to Fathi's (2022) research on the sense of home and belonging experienced by migrant men in Ireland, this study's participants were more likely to focus on present and future homes than past ones because they did not have a home to return to. Additionally, this last section's findings suggest that developing a sense of home also involves having entitlements to fundamental social rights, including access to health, education and housing (Brun and Fábos, 2015).

8.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the significance of feeling at home and finding a sense of belonging for the study's participants. More specifically, it explored homemaking practices in an insecure private rental market; the role of social relations in fostering a sense of

belonging; and home as access to social rights. Feeling at home was characterised by participants as encompassing a sense of peace, safety, and control (Boccagni, 2017), which stood in stark contrast to the 'ontological homelessness' they confronted when living in DP (O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). Participants' practices of decorating and arranging their accommodation according to their personal tastes (Bourdieu, 1984) were depicted as important to their ability to feel at home. Yet, these attempts at making a home were repeatedly disrupted by the insecurity of tenure in the private rental market (McKee et al., 2020).

The findings presented also highlight the role of social connections, particularly close family ties, friendships and relations with neighbours, in refugees' ability to establish a sense of home, while also drawing attention to the significant challenges they may confront as they attempt to build and maintain these connections. Separation from family members and participants' limited rights to family reunification negatively impacted their sense of belonging (Bonizzoni and Belloni, 2023; Fathi, 2022; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). Importantly, the findings demonstrate the role of housing quality, spatial capital and neighbourhood in participants' capacity to establish and sustain social connections (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Kaufmann et al., 2004; Rérat and Lees, 2011). Additionally, hostile and, in some cases, 'quiet' neighbourhoods limited participants' access to social capital (Hebbani et al., 2018; Putnam, 1993; Spicer, 2008). Thus, housing conditions and locations significantly impacted participants' ability to create a home and cultivate a sense of belonging.

Lastly, the findings indicate that home is not only about homemaking and social relations but also about having full access to social rights (Brun and Fábos, 2015). This access to social rights, combined with not being in a position to return to their original home, led participants to express their determination to make Ireland their present and future home (Fathi, 2022).

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to examine refugees' housing journeys in Ireland, focusing in particular on the transition from Direct Provision (DP) to housing. As outlined in Chapter Two, a significant number of studies have examined the barriers faced by refugees when attempting to secure affordable and adequate housing, thereby advancing understanding of how refugees navigate housing markets. To date, however, much of the research has focused on refugees' experiences of living in reception centres or on their attempts to secure housing in the private or social rented sector. Thus, while the existing body of research provides valuable insights into the experiences of refugees who live in reception centres or in the private rental market, understanding of the strategies deployed by them as they navigate the transition between these two distinct fields of housing remains limited. Using a combination of in-depth interviewing and the ethnographic 'Go-Along' approach, this research set out to examine how refugees in Ireland navigate and make sense of the transition from Direct Provision to housing. Underpinned by a constructivist approach, the research sought to place participants' narratives and their interpretation of their housing journeys at the centre of the analysis.

This concluding chapter starts by reflecting on the study's methodological approach before discussing the findings detailed in the four preceding chapters. The study's key findings are considered in relation to Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice*, particularly the concepts of field, capital and practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 2000; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). This is followed by a discussion of the policy implications of the study's findings. The chapter concludes by considering the limitations of the research and makes recommendations for the direction of future research on the housing experiences of refugees.

9.1. Understanding the Transition from Direct Provision to Housing Using Method Triangulation

A core argument of this thesis is that owing to the DP system's enduring impacts on refugees' financial resources and social networks, DP continues to shape the housing journeys of refugees long after they gain status and move into the private rental market. The transition out of DP therefore represents a critical period in terms of understanding refugees' housing experiences (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Strang et al., 2018). With the stated aim of exploring the transition from DP to housing through a combination of in-depth interviewing and the ethnographic approach of the

'Go-Along' (Flick et al., 2018), this research sought to recruit a diverse sample of refugee households, particularly in terms of household composition, country of origin, gender, and housing experiences, in order to generate a detailed understanding of refugees' housing journeys in the Irish context (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). The combined use of qualitative interviewing and the 'Go-Along' method permitted an in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences since their arrival in Ireland, including the processes associated with their adaptations to the DP system and the private rental market, the transition between these two fields, as well as the search for housing and their attempts to make a home.

Method triangulation facilitated an examination of refugees' housing journeys through different methodological perspectives, generating a rich understanding of the case under investigation (Flick, 2018). While qualitative interviewing provided access to the subjective meaning-making perspectives of participants (Flick, 2000; Mueller, 2019; Scheibelhofer, 2008), the ethnographic Go-along method permitted the study of social practice, place and milieu (Emmel and Clark, 2009; Flick et al., 2018), also enabling "other ways of observing, knowing, and appreciating the lived experience of another" (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019, p.77). The ethnographic 'Go-Along' approach was also particularly useful in exploring how participants relate to their spatial environment and in revealing what places allow refugees to experience acceptance and a sense of belonging (Emmel and Clark, 2009; Flick et al., 2018). This study's triangulation of methodological approaches therefore yielded a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the case under study (Flick, 2018).

Qualitative research on refugees' housing journeys, particularly after they gain status, has to date primarily employed qualitative interviewing to explore refugees' housing experiences. While the narratives elicited through qualitative interviewing have proven valuable in uncovering the barriers refugees face in accessing housing in the private and/or social rented markets, this study's use of 'Go-Alongs' has generated new perspectives on housing journeys of refugees (Evans and Jones, 2011; Flick et al., 2018; Hall, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003; O'Neill and Roberts, 2019). Importantly, the use of the 'Go-Along' empowered participants by rebalancing the inherent power dynamics typically present in interview situations in their favour and allowing the researcher to discover new sensory ways of observing (O'Neill and Roberts, 2019; Stiegler, 2021). This study's 'Go-Along' data has enhanced understanding of refugees' housing journeys in two main ways: first, the 'Go-Alongs' have provided deeper insight into the emotional processes that accompany

critical transitions such as gaining status and family reunification; second, the 'Go-Alongs' shifted the focus from barriers of access to housing to places where participants experienced acceptance, for example, from social networks, including friends and support organisations (Van Liempt and Staring, 2021). The 'Go-Along' approach, combined with in-depth interviewing, therefore proved valuable in generating a richer understanding of refugees' housing experiences.

9.2. Towards an Integrated Understanding of Refugees' Housing Journeys

In Ireland and in other jurisdictions, research on refugees' housing journeys has traditionally focused either on their experiences of life in state-provided refugee accommodation during the asylum process (Kreichauf, 2018; O'Reilly, 2018) or, thereafter, on their housing outcomes in the private or social rental markets once they gain refugee status (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019). As detailed in Chapter Two, both bodies of literature have, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on the adversities and barriers that refugees typically face in each of these two distinct housing fields. The literature on refugee accommodation has drawn attention to the isolation refugees experience as a result of dispersal policies, the long periods spent by them waiting for a decision on their asylum application, and the negative and sometimes traumatic experiences of living in highly institutionalised accommodation centres (Fanning and Veale, 2004; Higgins et al., 2019; Kreichauf, 2018; Moran et al., 2019; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010; O'Reilly, 2018; Soederberg, 2019; Spicer, 2008; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019). Research has also examined refugees' housing outcomes after gaining status, frequently focusing on barriers of access to housing, including their constrained financial means, poor or limited knowledge of the local language, bureaucratic hurdles associated with accessing welfare and housing payments and discrimination based on their race and/or poverty (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Obeid, 2019; Pearlman, 2017; Sherrell et al., 2007; Soederberg, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). This literature has often documented refugees' insecure housing outcomes, detailing experiences of overcrowding, homelessness and living in low-quality housing (Belloni, 2016; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Kissoon, 2010; Netto, 2011b; Oudshoorn et al., 2019; Sherrell et al., 2007; Silvius, 2020; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019a; Teixeira, 2008; Walsh et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2017). Yet, these two bodies of literature have remained largely separate, with less emphasis placed on advancing an integrated understanding of refugees' housing journeys

spanning both housing fields – Direct Provision and the private rental market – and the transition between these two accommodation fields (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022). This thesis argues that an integrated study of refugees’ housing journeys, produced through a detailed analysis of both fields of housing, is essential to understanding the enduring impact of state-provided refugee accommodation on refugees’ long-term housing journeys in the private rental market.

The findings of this research are broadly consistent with those documented in previous studies in highlighting the adverse effects of living in institutionalised, overcrowded and low-quality accommodation on refugees’ well-being and sense of safety (Kreichauf, 2018; O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010; O’Reilly, 2018; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019; Witteborn, 2011). In keeping with other recent research, this study has demonstrated that refugees’ lives are placed on hold during long wait periods for status, leaving them in a state of temporariness (Higgins et al., 2019; O’Reilly, 2018; Thorshaug and Brun, 2019; Witteborn, 2011). Living in *superdiverse* spaces, with limited privacy, sometimes led to tensions and conflict but also provided fertile ground for residents to create a sense of community (Hartmann, 2019; Hauge et al., 2017). The findings presented in earlier chapters also align with previous research that has highlighted the challenges confronted by refugees in the search for housing, which were associated with discrimination based on race, unemployment and their status as Housing Assistance Payment recipients (Adam et al., 2019; Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Finn and Mayock, 2022; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Obeid, 2019; Pearlman, 2017; Sherrell et al., 2007; Soederberg, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). While this study’s examination of the characteristics of each field of housing – DP and the private rented market, respectively – is in broad agreement with the findings of previous research, the findings presented shift attention to refugees’ strategies and practices when navigating these two distinct fields of housing. Furthermore, the study provides strong insight into both continuity in and disruption of participants’ practices when transitioning between the two fields, thereby contributing to an integrated understanding of refugees’ housing journeys in the country of resettlement.

Following Clapham’s (2005) observation that “the most appropriate way to judge public policies is on the basis of their impact on housing pathways over time” (p. 32), this research aimed to investigate how the policy of Direct Provision, as a system of state-imposed inequality, affects the housing experiences and outcomes of refugees during the transition from DP to the private rental market. By adopting an integrated perspective on refugees’ housing journeys – and recognising time spent living in asylum accommodation

as an important plank in refugees' housing journeys in the country of resettlement – this research has uncovered processes and policies that lead to refugees' disadvantaged position in the search for housing. Applying Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), the findings demonstrate the ways in which refugees adapted their practices to the distinct fields of DP and the private rental market, and how they navigated the transition between the two fields. The findings particularly draw attention to how the system of DP impacted refugees' economic, cultural, and social capital, with consequences for their transition from DP to housing, as well as their longer-term housing journeys.

9.2.1. *Adapting Practice to Direct Provision*

The findings presented in this thesis indicate that DP represents a distinct field of housing and welfare provision that profoundly impacts refugees' habitus and practice, with long-term consequences for their settlement journeys in Ireland. Deploying Bourdieu's concept of field (Bourdieu, 1977, 2000; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992), DP emerged as a field of housing that triggered processes of adaptation in habitus and practice, as refugees adapted their strategies to navigate this newly encountered field. As outlined above, the findings reported in Chapter Five align with previous studies' characterisations of the field of DP as stigmatising, isolating and institutionalised. Yet, by acknowledging that when a new field is encountered, the habitus adapts “gradually, progressively and imperceptibly” (Bourdieu, 2000, p.11) to this new field, this research directs attention to how these processes of adaptation structured refugees' practices. For example, a large number of the study's participants developed strategies to avoid the negative impacts of DP, while others actively resisted the oppressive system of DP. Importantly, some succeeded in carving out strategies that enabled them to reclaim some level of control over their housing journeys within a highly restrictive dispersal system. By enlisting ‘official people’ or vertical weak ties (Ryan et al., 2008) to advocate for transfers on their behalf, these participants managed to improve their housing situations, as well as their access to new social networks and educational opportunities, in many cases. Thus, social capital was particularly important to refugees when navigating a de-commodified field of housing, such as DP (Aigner, 2019; Boterman, 2012). While these vertical weak ties opened new avenues of opportunity, their reliance on these ties also highlights that, owing to their disadvantaged position, the voices of asylum seekers were largely disregarded, rendering them dependent on social links with solicitors, GPs, local volunteers and others to advocate on their behalf.

The use of Bourdieu's (1977) *Theory of Practice* to study the practices of refugees within the field of DP can help to overcome the tendency within refugee studies to negate

refugees' agency by conceptualising their lives in accommodation centres as 'bare life' (Lentin, 2015; Walters, 2008). As the findings presented in Chapter Five demonstrate, in response to the hierarchical systems of power that operate in DP centres, participants developed strategies which they hoped would help them to avoid or circumvent the field of DP by engaging in meaningful activities outside of the centres. While this research focused primarily on the housing experiences of refugees, Bourdieu acknowledges that agents are always part of a variety of distinct but intersecting fields (Atkinson, 2020; Bourdieu, 1977, 2000; Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992). Engagement in meaningful activities outside the DP centre draws attention to participants' involvement in and contribution to other fields – such as the fields of education or the arts – with their entry to and participation in these fields permitting them to create a physical distance from the centres. Yet, the findings also show that not all participants were able to avoid the DP system to the same degree. Single mothers, for instance, spent more time on a daily basis in DP centres due to their childcare responsibilities and they also depended to a greater extent on the support they received from the DP community, which meant that their opportunities to avoid the negative consequences of the system were diminished. Irrespective of gender, while some participants focused on avoiding the system, others chose to actively resist the system's oppressive regime by asserting themselves in their interactions with staff and/or by advocating for fundamental change to the system. These strategies of avoidance and resistance resemble the practices of tactical resistance identified by de Certeau (1984), whereby individuals navigate and subvert dominant power structures in the course of their everyday lives (de Certeau, 1984; Ramachandran and Vathi, 2022).

9.2.2. *A Dual Transition*

As documented in earlier chapters, the juridical decision to grant status triggered a dual transition: a bureaucratic and symbolic transition from the status of asylum seeker to refugee and a transition between two housing fields, namely from DP to the private rental market. In determining that the person has become a recognised refugee and defining their corresponding rights and duties, "the State wields a genuinely creative, quasi-divine, power" (Bourdieu et al., 1994, p.12). The findings presented in Chapter Six highlight the significant impact on participants of gaining status, particularly in terms of conferring the freedom and right to start their lives in Ireland. This newly acquired status therefore provided certainty by confirming their right to remain in Ireland and also granted full access to social rights and the labour market. At the same time, the DP system meant that

participants had lived – often for a protracted period – in a form of state-imposed ‘ontological homelessness’ (O’Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). Gaining status therefore meant that they had finally gained the right to make Ireland their home (Brun and Fábos, 2015).

Yet, gaining status evoked a mix of feelings among participants, comprising a combination of relief and exhaustion. Feelings of relief stemmed from knowing that they could finally (re)start their lives, having escaped a prolonged period of marginalisation, very limited control over their everyday lives, and highly constrained rights as asylum seekers. Feelings of exhaustion, on the other hand, arose from the challenges they had endured while living in DP, which were often associated with a lack of privacy and tensions among residents. In addition, as examined in Chapter Six, the bureaucratic transition from the status of asylum seeker to refugee required refugees to acquire the knowledge to navigate a new set of bureaucratic rules and procedures (Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2016; Obeid, 2019; Strang et al., 2018). This transition from the DP welfare system to the mainstream welfare system generated a significant administrative burden and required participants to gain a new form of field-specific administrative or navigational capital, supported by their social networks, NGO support workers, as well as friends and acquaintances from the DP community (Masood and Azfar Nisar, 2020; Yosso, 2005).

9.2.2.1. Refugees' Position in the Private Rental Market

Wacquant and Bourdieu (1992) maintain that an agent’s position is shaped by the volume and type of capital available to them, which in turn determines whether an agent is able to succeed in a particular field (Wacquant and Bourdieu, 1992, p.96). The findings presented in Chapter Five cast considerable light on the impact of time spent in DP on participants’ ability to acquire new economic capital. Limited welfare payments, benefits-in-kind, and restricted access to the labour market significantly restricted their capacity to acquire economic capital. As a consequence, once they gained status, a majority remained reliant on welfare assistance and had limited financial resources, which in turn had a detrimental effect on their position within the field of the private rental market.

During their housing search, refugees encountered a private rental market marked by racial discrimination (Finn and Mayock, 2022; Grotti et al., 2018; Gusciute et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2006), exclusion based on their status as welfare beneficiaries and, in certain instances, their status as ‘unemployed’ (Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Racial discrimination, combined with welfare stigma (Bolton et al., 2022), resulted in participants

carrying significant negative symbolic capital (Barker, 2013; Bourdieu, 2000; Farrugia, 2011; Garrett, 2015; Peillon, 1998). Although gaining refugee status meant that some of the negative symbolic capital associated with the status of ‘asylum seeker’ was lifted, refugees continued to have relatively low symbolic capital associated with their status as immigrants, their ethnicity, as well as their status as welfare beneficiaries and ‘unemployed’. As discussed in Chapter Six, refugees at times struggled to pinpoint the source of discrimination, highlighting that “discriminatory processes towards migrants (and minorities) are systemic, and slippery in that they can be difficult to precisely evidence and challenge” (Lukes et al., 2019, p.3201). As a result, refugees frequently experienced exclusion in the private rental market as *silence*, which essentially represents a form of ostracism (Rudert et al., 2017).

Drawing on Yosso’s Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005), the findings of this research reveal the extent to which participants drew on navigational cultural capital in their search for housing. Yosso (2005) contends that “navigational capital refers to skills of manoeuvring through social institutions”, particularly those institutions characterised by racialised discrimination (Yosso, 2005, p.80). While previous studies have emphasised the role of language classes (Weidinger and Kordel, 2023) and time (Murdie, 2002) in the development of a detailed understanding of the private rental market among refugees in their countries of settlement, the findings documented in this thesis highlight the role of social networks, media consumption and personal experience in the acquisition of navigational cultural capital. While this navigational cultural capital proved essential to refugees in navigating the housing market, it also prompted adaptations in their housing search practices, leading many to adopt practices such as concealing parts of their identity, lowering their expectations and attempting to persuade landlords of their deservingness (McKee et al., 2020; St. Arnault and Merali, 2019b).

Social networks in the form of social bonds, social bridges and social links (Ager and Strang, 2008) played a key role in facilitating refugees’ access to information on how to navigate the field of DP, the private rental market, and the transition between these two fields. This points to the convertibility of social capital into navigational cultural capital. While participants drew on a range of close and weak ties with co-ethnics, other DP residents and locals, the cross-ethnic relationships built by them within DP proved particularly valuable when seeking an understanding of the housing market. These types of cross-ethnic social networks – which were closely connected to the field of DP and consisted of strong and weak ties – were formed based on a shared experience of

displacement while living alongside each other in DP and provided access to navigational cultural capital. Previous research has found that cross-ethnic connections are “induced primarily by the absence of an organised reception and assistance system” (Korac, 2001, p.15). In contrast, this study’s findings indicate that the reception conditions of DP created fertile ground for the formation of cross-ethnic connections and support networks. This finding echoes those of Hauge et al. (2017), who found that centralised accommodation centres can play an important role in providing access to information among their residents.

9.2.2.2. *Adapting to the Private Rental Market*

Next to the legal transition from the status of asylum seeker to refugee, the move from DP to housing signifies a second key transition; one associated with refugees’ ability to actualise their newly won rights and freedoms. Clapham (2005) identified junctions in housing pathways as central analytical foci. This thesis posits that Bourdieu’s (1977) *Theory of Practice* offers a useful theoretical framework from which to develop a nuanced understanding of these pathway junctions. As documented in Chapter Seven, refugees’ perceptions of the private rental market were strongly shaped by the experience of DP, which can be taken to indicate that DP profoundly impacted their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Refugees associated the transition from DP to housing with reclaiming control over their day-to-day lives, finding peace, and regaining a sense of normality, which stood in sharp contrast to the lack of autonomy and control that characterised everyday life in DP. The fact that moving from DP to housing was associated with regaining a ‘normal life’ underscores the assertion that DP constitutes a space of ‘exception’ (Agamben, 2000; Diken, 2004; Jenkins, 2004). While moving out was overwhelmingly associated with positive feelings, some participants also commented that leaving the familiar field of DP behind triggered feelings of insecurity, doubt, and alienation. This resonates with Bourdieu’s assertion that the habitus is inert and tends “to perpetuate structures corresponding to their conditions of production” (Bourdieu, 2000, p.160), meaning that it took participants time to adapt their habitus, which had been shaped by DP, to the newly encountered field of the private rental market. While Clapham (2005) argues that “attitudes and meanings held by households about their housing circumstances and their influence on their behaviour are crucial to an understanding of the housing field” (Clapham, 2005, p.37), this study’s findings suggest that the reverse also holds true in that understanding a housing field is essential to comprehending the attitudes and meanings held by households.

In line with previous research on the experiences of lower socio-economic groups in the private rental market, the findings documented in Chapter Seven indicate that the Irish private rental market is characterised by an unequal relationship between landlords and tenants, coupled with the insecurities arising from the constant risk of tenancy termination (Byrne and McArdle, 2022; Hearne and Murphy, 2017). Bourdieu posits that entering a new field triggers an “immediate adherence” to the unspoken rules of a field, which is crucial for a field’s reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977, p.164). Confronted with persistent housing insecurity in the private rental market, participants emphasised that gaining access to permanent and secure housing became a priority, not least in avoiding the risk or possibility of homelessness. Since local authority housing or home ownership were not realistic options, participants’ strategies in navigating the private rental market centred on making their tenancies as secure as possible. With the aim of improving tenancy security, they prioritised timely rental payments, strove to be ‘good’ tenants and sometimes delayed entry to the labour market in order to avoid losing access to Housing Assistance Payments or other social welfare benefits. These practices, which were borne out of necessity, resulted in the further cementation of the socio-economically disadvantaged position of a large number of the study’s participants.

Refugees’ experiences of navigating the private rental market to a large extent echo the experiences of other lower-income renters in terms, for example, of experiences of discrimination as recipients of a housing subsidy, displacement to suburban neighbourhoods or commuter towns and/or feelings of powerlessness in the face of unequal landlord-tenant relationships (Bobek et al., 2021; Hearne and Murphy, 2017; McKee et al., 2020; Waldron, 2023). However, the situations of asylum seekers and refugees are distinct. For example, refugees are far less likely to be able to avail of financial or other material support from family members that would bolster the chances of securing housing (Bobek et al., 2021). Importantly, this research has also shown that while refugees experience the private rental market as insecure, living in the private rental market – in contrast to life in DP – was frequently associated by them with greater freedom and control over their day-to-day life, as well as a sense of peace and normality. Refugees’ initial and early positive perspectives on the move to private rented accommodation therefore differ from the experiences of other low-income renters in the private rental market, which are often associated with feelings of insecurity and powerlessness (Byrne and McArdle, 2022; McKee et al., 2020). As demonstrated in Chapter Seven, this, of course, did not mean that

these positive perspectives endured; in fact, over time, they were more often undermined by the inherent insecurities of the private rental market.

9.2.3. *Refugees' Housing Journeys.*

This thesis identified two distinct housing journeys. The first was the *linear housing journey*, which was followed by a majority of participants when securing accommodation in the private rental market with the Housing Assistance Payment. In this housing journey, accommodation was secured either through independent searches using rental property websites or through viewings arranged by NGOs. A second, smaller group followed a *turbulent housing journey* and had moved through a number of insecure, temporary accommodations, which they had accessed through social connections to co-ethnics, locals and/or family members (Aigner, 2019; Carter and Osborne, 2009; Francis and Hiebert, 2014; Kissoon, 2010; Teixeira, 2008). Accommodation accessed through these networks often led them to become temporarily housed in an informal housing sub-market with limited security and, at times, led to homelessness or situations of hidden homelessness. These social networks, which frequently connected individuals of similarly disadvantaged positions, offered limited access to mobilisable resources, which cannot be equated with social capital in a Bourdieusian sense (Anthias, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986).

The importance of household priorities in shaping refugees' housing journeys aligns with the housing career approach in underscoring the importance of processes such as family formation and professional and educational careers in explaining the mobility choices of households (Kendig, 1984; Peter H. Rossi, 1980; Peter H Rossi and Shlay, 1982). Yet, the findings of this research differ significantly from the cyclical pattern described by proponents of the housing career approach, who view housing careers as a series of "moves from renting to owning, as people become more settled and permanency becomes more important" (Kendig, 1984, p.272). A number of authors have emphasised that what constitutes a successful housing career needs to be considered within specific economic and social contexts and can also include careers within the social rented housing sector (Bolt and Van Kempen, 2002; Skovgaard Nielsen, 2017). However, refugee households in the current study struggled to carve out successful housing careers due to persistent uncertainty within the private rental market coupled with strong barriers of access to social housing and/or homeownership. The absence of successful housing careers among refugees is therefore likely to increase the risk of the racialisation of housing disadvantage in the Irish private rental sector, as previously observed in countries including the UK and Germany (Bernt et al., 2022; Lukes et al., 2019; Rex et al., 1967).

Building on the work of Giddens (1991), Clapham (2005) posits that housing is central to identity formation and self-fulfilment. Similarly, the refugees interviewed for this study reported that adequate housing was critical to their ability to live in accordance with their own values. Refugees told of investing significant time and resources into decorating their accommodations and purchasing their own furniture. However, while housing was important for identity formation and developing a sense of home, as this study's findings have shown, refugees' housing pathways were often significantly constrained and permitted only very limited choice. Furthermore, notices of termination and low-quality accommodation undermined their efforts to establish and make a home in the private rental market.

Lastly, the thesis explored the interrelationship between participants' housing situations/journeys and their ability to find a sense of home in Ireland. Life in DP meant that participants had no sense of control and that they lacked a feeling of personal safety, both of which are critical aspects of feeling at home (Boccagni, 2017). Yet, despite these challenges, DP became a familiar space for many participants; a place where they built friendships and received practical support from the DP community (Boccagni, 2017). Once participants moved from DP to housing, they gained a sense of personal safety and control but also had to invest time and effort into making the space familiar once more (Boccagni, 2017). Moreover, feelings of familiarity and a sense of home were constantly challenged by the insecurity of private rented housing (McKee et al., 2020) and, faced with this continued housing insecurity, social relations became more important to many participants in developing a sense of home (Fathi, 2022; Simich et al., 2010). Importantly, continued separation from family members negatively impacted many participants' sense of belonging (Bonizzoni and Belloni, 2023; Fathi, 2022; Fozdar and Hartley, 2014). In addition, housing conditions, the availability of spatial capital and neighbourhood composition impacted participants' capacity to establish and sustain social connections (Fozdar and Hartley, 2014; Hebbani et al., 2018; Kaufmann et al., 2004; Rérat and Lees, 2011). While homemaking practices and social relations played an important role in fostering a sense of home, this thesis posits that, in contexts of displacement, policies of inclusion and exclusion influence individuals' ability to find a sense of home (Brun and Fábos, 2015). Participants in this research agreed that they wanted to make their home in a place where they would have full access to fundamental rights, including the right to housing, education and health. Gaining status therefore also represented a critical turning

point in ending a period of ‘ontological homelessness’ (O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010), allowing participants to make a home ‘away from home’.

9.3. Policy Recommendations

As highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, refugees' housing journeys are underpinned by two contradicting policy goals: on the one hand, the policy of Direct Provision, which aims to deter people from seeking asylum in Ireland (Atkins, 2015; Loyal and Quilley, 2016; Thornton, 2014) and, on the other, a range of policies that aim to integrate refugees into Irish society once they gain status. Aligned with this thesis' integrated approach to understanding refugees' housing journeys in Ireland, the policy recommendations presented in this section are rooted in the belief that an integrated approach to refugee housing policy is crucial to effectively improve the long-term housing outcomes of refugees. The presentation of policy recommendations is structured according to three specific issues: reception conditions, transition supports, and the integration of refugees' housing needs into mainstream housing policy.

9.3.1. A New Reception System

Across Europe, states have established ‘unhomely’ reception conditions to accommodate people seeking asylum, effectively denying them full access to social rights (Kreichauf, 2018). Governments often argue that these restrictive policies are essential to minimising the ‘pull factor’ of reception conditions (Bloch and Schuster, 2002; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). Current reception conditions thus provide an example of how social policy is instrumentalised by states for migration control (Tervonen et al., 2018; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). In times of severe housing shortage, as is currently the case in Ireland, policies of deterrence may appear to be a common-sense measure that will help to alleviate pressures within local housing markets. Yet, research has repeatedly shown that reception conditions have no significant impact on refugees' choice of destination country (Lafleur & Marfouk, 2019, cited in Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022, p.13; Böcker and Havinga, 1998; Mayblin, 2016; V. Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Indeed, some studies suggest that asylum seekers treated more humanely accept having to return to their country of origin if they receive a negative decision on their asylum application (Winter et al., 2018, cited in Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022). While this body of research raises significant doubt about the efficacy of policies of deterrence, the harm these policies inflict (Fanning et al., 2001; Mayblin et al., 2019) and their negative consequences for refugees' long-term integration (Bakker et al., 2016) are well-documented and are also evidenced in this thesis' findings.

Research conducted in several European countries has highlighted that dominant policy and media discourses that portray people seeking asylum as taking advantage of the welfare state have allowed damaging reception conditions to persist (Bakker et al., 2016; Giansanti et al., 2022; Mayblin et al., 2019; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). In Ireland, however, the adequacy of reception conditions has been frequently and regularly questioned in both public and academic discourse (Lentin, 2015; Ombudsman, 2018; Thornton, 2014). Furthermore, the pressures exerted by this critical discourse over many years culminated in the Irish Government publishing a White Paper in February 2021 outlining its plans to replace the current system of DP with own-door accommodation and increased welfare payments by 2024 (Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth, 2021). The publication of this White Paper signalled a fundamental change in the direction of policy and was welcomed by refugee organisations, academics, political parties and refugee activists as an essential step towards establishing a more humane reception system (Coakley and MacEinri, 2022).

One of the characteristics of the newly proposed reception system detailed in the White Paper is that refugees would spend four months in six regional reception centres prior to being accommodated in a mix of tenure types⁸⁵ in the community. Internationally, ending housing segregation and providing decentralised housing in the community has repeatedly been argued to be critical to fostering inclusion, independence and well-being (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; Hauge et al., 2017). In the Irish context, Coakley and MacEinri (2022) noted that this new policy “may very well signal the Irish state's final acceptance of the IP applicant's right to be in place, irrespective of residency status” (p.1036). However, while decentralised housing has the potential to generate greater opportunities for independent living, it can also impede access to information (Hauge et al., 2017) and create barriers to social interaction (Mayblin et al., 2019). As demonstrated in this research, centralised accommodation played an important role in providing refugees with access to information and social networks, not least when navigating various bureaucratic processes, including the housing search. While the White Paper explicitly highlights the need to support access to information, it is unclear how information would be provided and communicated once people move from the initial reception centres into the community.

⁸⁵ Accommodation would be provided through a mix of housing provision including approved housing bodies, urban renewal schemes, hosting programmes and private tenancies.

While the importance of the White Paper and its proposals to end the system of DP cannot be understated and would significantly improve asylum seekers' living conditions, asylum accommodation would, according to the White Paper's plans, nonetheless remain part of a separate housing system, which is problematic for a number of reasons. First, providing housing through a separate system risks either adding to stigmatisation or evoking tensions between socioeconomically marginalised groups. Furthermore, decentralised but visibly different or poor-quality accommodation has been shown to have a stigmatising effect in other jurisdictions, including Norway and Germany (Hauge et al., 2017; Sowa, 2020), while the provision of good-quality housing is likely to stoke tension in the context of a housing crisis. Second, with no tenancy rights, the housing provided will likely continue to severely undermine asylum seekers' sense of security. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, operating a separate system would continue to require refugees to transition into the 'regular' private rental market once they gain status. As this research has shown, moving from one bureaucratic field to another and from one housing field to another is associated with a significant administrative burden, which could be reduced by a more seamless, integrated system.

An alternative to operating a separate system of accommodation for asylum seekers would be to include asylum seekers in mainstream housing and welfare supports, similar to the system in place in Canada (Kissoon, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1997), which allows asylum seekers to search for housing in the regular housing market. While such a policy bears the risk of people experiencing homelessness upon arrival (Kissoon, 2010; O'Sullivan, 1997), this risk could be mitigated through the provision of initial homelessness emergency/reception centres that would provide targeted integration, transition and medical support to new arrivals and thereby alleviate any pressures that could potentially be placed on mainstream homelessness services. Including asylum seekers in mainstream housing and welfare provision has various advantages. On the one hand, it would reduce the current system's complexity and remove the need for refugees to transition between two bureaucratic systems once status is gained. On the other hand, and more importantly, providing adequate housing and welfare support to asylum seekers sends a strong signal that asylum seekers are equally deserving of support and that they are not lesser human beings (Mayblin et al., 2019; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). Furthermore, such a policy would permit asylum seekers to lead a more 'normal' life and to develop a sense of home while waiting for a decision on their asylum application (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022).

There are strong grounds for arguing for the cessation or easing of the current policy of dispersal⁸⁶, which would enable asylum seekers to reside in geographical areas where they have better opportunities to access employment, education and social networks. The practice of dispersing new arrivals to remote, low-income, predominately white neighbourhoods has repeatedly been shown to create mistrust between local residents and asylum seekers (Echavarría Alvarez, 2014; Ní Chiosáin, 2019; Spicer, 2008). The Swedish reception system, which offers new arrivals a choice of whether they want to secure accommodation independently or join the dispersal system, has been demonstrated to significantly bolster refugees' ability to access education and employment (Bevelander et al., 2019). Such a system may also have the potential to reduce the necessity for onward mobility at the point of gaining status and, therefore cause less disruption to neighbourhoods and communities (Ager and Strang, 2008) and also have a positive impact on well-being (Ziersch et al., 2017).

9.3.2. Supporting the Transition from Direct Provision to Housing

The McMahon Report and the Transition Taskforce established in 2016 led to significant improvements to the reception conditions of asylum seekers in Ireland, associated with the provision of targeted transition supports by two housing organisations and ending the 'catch-22' situation described in Chapter Six, whereby refugees could only apply for social welfare payments having secured accommodation outside of DP but, without access to welfare, struggled to secure accommodation. However, while important improvements are evident, the findings presented in this thesis indicate that refugees continue to rely heavily on information provided by their informal networks of friends and acquaintances when navigating housing and other systems. Consideration should therefore be given to expanding current transition supports. In the UK context, Phillips (2006) stresses the "importance of pro-active 'move-on' support" (Phillips, 2006, p.548), which is culturally sensitive and holistic, not only in supporting access to housing but also access to education, healthcare, the labour market and community networks, while also offering advice and assistance on the matter of family reunification. The type of assistance required by refugees will depend on their individual situations (Netto, 201b). This research has shown that female participants with caring responsibilities might particularly benefit from targeted 'move-on' support since they appear to be far more restricted in their ability to engage with social support networks outside of DP centres due to their childcare

⁸⁶ The White Paper (2021) foresees the continued dispersal of asylum seekers nationwide.

responsibilities. Long-term, consideration should be given to integrating refugee-specific transition supports into mainstream supports as, otherwise, service provision “risks fostering isolationism and resentment from host populations” (Landau, 2006, p.321). Currently, in Ireland, mainstream services are unable to accommodate diversity. The Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020, for instance, which aimed to enhance migrants’ access to mainstream services by increasing the availability of interpretation services to public services in educating frontline staff about migrants’ entitlements and rights, as well as offering intercultural communication training to staff, was not sufficient to facilitate access to mainstream welfare supports for refugees (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). As the current research has shown, refugees frequently did not feel confident to manage and navigate the system independently, which strongly suggests a need to make services more accessible.

When transitioning from DP to the private rental market, economic capital is key to rental affordability. As documented earlier in this thesis, inadequate social welfare provision, combined with labour market exclusion during the asylum process, led many into protracted poverty, contributing to what Giansanti et al. (2022, p.590) have termed a “racialisation of poverty and destitution”. Expanding refugees’ access to welfare, the labour market and educational opportunities must, therefore, be a policy imperative. Ending policies of dispersal, extending the right to work, and recognising prior learning and qualifications, play a key role in facilitating access to the labour market (Bakker et al., 2016; Doras, 2021; Fasani et al., 2022). While income from employment has a major impact on the ability to afford rent, this study’s findings demonstrate that being ‘employed’ also carries symbolic value which can, in turn, facilitate access to housing. Another factor is the provision of housing subsidies that enable individuals to compete for accommodation in the private rental market. For example, in some cities, like Berlin, refugees’ housing allowances are topped up by 20% to bolster their ability to access affordable housing (Soederberg, 2019). While this measure acknowledges that refugees face even greater barriers than other local welfare beneficiaries when seeking access to housing, providing refugees with increased housing payments potentially risks stoking tensions between different disadvantaged groups on the housing market. The Irish Government’s current approach of providing refugees exiting DP with access to the increased Homelessness HAP payment is arguably a more adequate policy response: the increased payment is not linked to their refugee status, but rather the payment recognises that living in DP equates to a situation of homelessness. Finally, particular attention needs to be paid to how Housing

Assistance Payments can be provided in a way that does not force family households to delay or discourage entry to the labour market.

For many refugees, family reunification is an integral part of the transition from asylum seeker to refugee. Yet, family reunification has been shown to lead to a particularly high risk of homelessness, which is extremely stressful for those families affected (Smith et al., 2020). Measures to prevent this type of homelessness could include providing family sponsors with access to increased HAP payments as well as targeted support in securing adequate accommodation prior to their family's arrival (Smith et al., 2020). If no accommodation can be found, the provision of adequate emergency accommodation that provides a supportive and caring environment is critical to successful family reunification.

9.3.3. Recognising Refugees in Housing Policy

Housing policy in Ireland has been largely silent on the position of migrants, including refugees, in the Irish housing market. A critical first step in addressing this silence would be for housing policies to acknowledge that migrants, including refugees, are particularly affected by pressures and insecurities in the private rental market and, as a direct consequence, may be disproportionately at risk of housing instability and homelessness. The *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland* strategy published in September 2021, defines the provision of “housing and supports to facilitate community integration for Refugees” (Department of Housing, 2021, p.71) as one of its objectives. The two actions associated with this objective aim to continue to provide local authority housing to programme refugees and support the implementation of the White Paper discussed earlier. However, no actions aimed at addressing the housing insecurity and exclusion refugees experience when renting in the private rental market with HAP are outlined. There is clearly further scope for policymakers to address the housing exclusion experienced by refugees through, for example, the development of an intercultural housing strategy that positions housing as a key issue within the Migrant Integration Strategy. Data collection processes and procedures should also be improved by, for example, recording legal status histories and including individuals living in DP in the official homelessness figures. At a local level, local authority housing strategies need to recognise refugees as a group that faces particular challenges of access to sustainable housing and recognise housing as a key area for migrant integration.

Ultimately, the policies and initiatives that are most likely to support refugees' access to housing are those that prioritise the provision of an adequate supply of long-

term, secure and affordable housing options, whether in the private rental market, through social housing or in the context of homeownership. Many participants in this study had spent several years living in DP, which is effectively a situation of homelessness. Thus, counting the time spent in DP towards the waiting time for social housing warrants consideration. Since 2016, protections for tenants in the private rental market have been significantly increased through, for instance, the introduction of rent pressure zones (Byrne and McArdle, 2022). However, there is scope to expand current rent controls to ensure that the sale of properties does not automatically result in notices of termination (Lima et al., 2023). In the meantime, access to cost rental and local authority housing needs to be expanded (Byrne and McArdle, 2022; Finnerty and O'Connell, 2018; Hearne and Murphy, 2017) while ensuring good quality housing and safe communities. Participatory consultation with people directly affected by housing insecurity needs to be at the core of any policy change. Additionally, from a civil society perspective, housing movements can provide opportunities to build an interracial class coalition (Lima, 2021; Sassi, 2021) “that blurs the migrant/non-migrant divide and calls for housing for all” (Sowa, 2020, p.116).

Finally, this research calls attention to the need to put home at the centre of refugee housing policy⁸⁷. Furthermore, an integrated approach to refugee housing policy is necessary if Ireland is to fulfil its commitment under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014) to not discriminate on the basis of race⁸⁸ when considering the housing needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Importantly, taking an integrated approach means embedding housing provision during the asylum process into mainstream housing provision so that refugees' rights to adequate housing are recognised from day one, thereby permitting them to make a new home and find a sense of belonging (Beeckmans and Geldof, 2022; O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010).

9.4. Study Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

A qualitative exploration of refugees' housing journeys in Ireland – like any research endeavour – has limitations that require consideration. Qualitative research is invaluable to the conduct of in-depth, nuanced examinations of social phenomena through the investigation of processes, practices, and experiences, as well as the meanings attached by research participants to them. However, because qualitative research typically enlists

⁸⁷ Similar to Byrne and Sassi (2021) who have called to “put home at the centre of policy in the PRS [Private Rental Sector]” (Byrne and Sassi, 2021, p.17).

⁸⁸ Under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act (2014) race covers skin colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin.

small samples, the findings arising from such studies are not generalisable in the conventional sense (Creswell, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 2006) and conclusions cannot be drawn, for example, on the prevalence of a particular phenomenon. Quantitative research has the potential to fill this gap by revealing what groups are particularly disadvantaged in the housing market and, for example, are more likely to experience homelessness. While attempts have been made to assess the long-term impact of reception conditions on refugees' outcomes, particularly in terms of labour market participation (cf. Fasani et al., 2022; McGinnity, Privalko, et al., 2020; O'Connell, 2019), this body of research has also highlighted the lack of survey and administrative data in Ireland that records the legal status history of individuals, which in turn limits quantitative analyses of this kind. In terms of transition experiences, the administrative data collected by the two housing organisations tasked by the Irish Government to support refugees' transition from DP to housing, as well as by the International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS), could present an opportunity to quantitatively examine what groups are more likely to remain stuck in DP centres and who has greater success in moving on more quickly. Longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research would particularly bolster understanding of the housing journeys of refugees over time.

The sampling strategy used in this research has both strengths and limitations. The study succeeded in recruiting a diverse sample of participants, including individuals of different nationalities, gender, marital status, household composition and age. The housing experiences and journeys of the study's participants were varied, which was important to generate an understanding of the breadth of refugees' experiences. Sample diversity in terms of country of origin, however, also meant that historical and cultural aspects of homemaking could not be examined in-depth. As Hoellerer (2017) observes, "each refugee group's perception of home and cultural identity [...] requires interdisciplinary analyses of the various historic, political, and individual processes that led to displacement" (p. 142). An in-depth exploration of the historical and cultural background impacting the housing experiences of refugees would require a study design that focuses on a group that shares a similar cultural background. Including the period prior to displacement in the research design, for example, through a biographical approach, would help to overcome the 'methodological nationalism' described by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003).

Furthermore, broadening the sampling strategy to include participants of different legal statuses and/or a more diverse range of socioeconomic groups could shed light on

how refugees' housing market experiences differ. While several studies in Ireland have examined the housing experiences of migrants, including refugees (Finn, 2015; Pillinger, 2009; Portley, 2015), there is a dearth of research comparing the housing and housing market experiences of refugees with those experiences of Irish-born groups. Another consideration would be to include failed asylum seekers in research on refugees' housing journeys. By excluding the housing experiences of asylum seekers who do not succeed in gaining status from this research, it is acknowledged that this study risks reproducing categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrant groups (cf. O'Mahony and Sweeney, 2010). While the focus on the lived experiences of refugees is valuable in shedding light on their experiences of accessing housing, this research has shown that housing journeys evolve in interactions with a wide variety of actors such as volunteers, support organisations, local authorities, neighbours and landlords. Calls to 'study up', which would mean considering not only disadvantaged groups but also the privileged groups with whom they interact (Crossley, 2017) emphasise the importance also of including these actors in the research design.

Whilst acknowledging these limitation, this study's combined use of the ethnographic 'Go-Along' approach and in-depth interviewing is innovative in the sense of opening avenues for greater participation and expression of the importance of place in shaping practice. The research design's focus on refugees' housing journeys since their arrival in Ireland permitted the development of a nuanced understanding of how national policies such as reception conditions and housing policies shape refugees' housing practices, experiences and journeys in Ireland.

9.5. Reflections on a Changing Policy Context

Since the conclusion of data collection for this research in October 2021, the context of refugees' housing journeys in Ireland has changed significantly. In 2022, Ireland recorded 13,651 applications for international protection – the highest number of applicants in twenty years – representing a four-fold increase in applications compared to 2021 when only 2,648 applications were made and an increase of 186% compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019 when 4,782 individuals applied for international protection (Minister for Justice, 2023; Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). Cunliffe et al.'s (2022) analysis of the factors that have driven this increase in international protection applications identifies the easing of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the increase in conflicts and volatility in international protection applicants' countries of origin, as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine as the leading causes of this increase in applications. After a short reprieve during the Covid-19

pandemic, the years 2022 and 2023, once again, witnessed increasing private market rental costs (Doolan et al., 2022) and a growing number of people accessing homelessness emergency accommodation. By November 2023, 13,318 people accessed emergency accommodation, surpassing pre-pandemic levels (Department of Housing, 2023). The renewed tightening of the private rental market meant that refugees who had gained status during that time struggled to secure accommodation in the private rental market. In October 2023, 5,650 people with status continued to live in DP centres (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). People becoming stuck in DP, combined with the stark increase in international protection applicants, placed significant pressure on Ireland's DP system, prompting the Irish government to open an additional 61 centres in 2022 to accommodate a total of 19,104 individuals by the end of 2022 (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). In addition, a transit hub for recently arrived applicants was established in the Citywest Convention Centre.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the pressures experienced by the DP system during 2022 and 2023 led to a further deterioration in reception conditions for international protection applicants. By November 2023, approximately 430 individuals were accommodated in tents across three distinct DP campsites (MacRedmond, 2023). In addition, on 24 January 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) informed that accommodation centres had reached capacity and that adult international protection applicants, including couples and single women, would no longer be offered accommodation on arrival (Irish Refugee Council, 2023). Between January and June 2023, 1,393 international protection applicants did not receive an accommodation offer on arrival, leaving them vulnerable to experiencing rooflessness and destitution (Irish Refugee Council, 2023). In response to these deteriorating reception conditions, several legal cases were brought to the High Court contesting the legality of these measures. On 21 April 2024, the high court judge, Mr. Justice Charles Meenan, eventually decided on what he considered a 'lead case', the case *S.Y. vs The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth* (2023). The judge declared that the Minister's failure to provide accommodation, food and basic conditions for hygiene was unlawful as it did not fulfil the "material reception conditions" required under the provisions of the European Communities (Reception Conditions) Regulations, 2018 (S.I. 230 of 2018). The judge also noted that this failure was in breach of Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In the aftermath of this ruling, the situation gradually improved, with DCEDIY offering accommodation once more to new arrivals throughout summer and

autumn 2023. Yet, by December 2023, the Department again stopped accommodating newly arriving international protection applicants (DCEDIY, 2024). This time, however, it was only male applicants who were no longer offered accommodation, and each of these men underwent a vulnerability assessment, leading to the most vulnerable applicants being offered accommodation (DCEDIY, 2024). In addition, applicants who were not allocated accommodation received a weekly contingency payment of Euro 75 on top of their weekly allowance of Euro 38.80. Between December 12th 2023 and January 26th 2024, 856 male applicants were not provided with accommodation on arrival (DCEDIY, 2024). While some improvements were made, the failure to offer accommodation on arrival remained, prompting IHREC to take legal action “to compel the State to fulfil its legal obligations to provide for the basic needs of IP applicants” with the High Court ruling (IHREC, 2023b). At the time of writing, the outcome of this case had not been decided.

In addition to the increase in international protection applicants, Ukrainian refugees started to arrive in Ireland following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. On 4 March 2022, the European Council declared the arrival of Ukrainian refugees as a mass influx, thereby activating the Temporary Protection Directive; a Directive introduced in 2001 to deal with surges in applications for refugee status (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). Between February 2022 and December 2023, 101,700 Ukrainian nationals and residents were granted temporary protection, 74,500 of whom lived in state-provided accommodation (Department of the Taoiseach, 2023). On arrival, Ukrainian refugees became eligible to apply for temporary protection, which provides full welfare payments, child benefits, access to the labour market, medical care and education, as legislated for in the *International Protection Act 2015*. To coordinate the Department’s various activities in supporting new arrivals, the government established the *Cabinet Committee on Humanitarian Response to Ukraine* in April 2022. Accommodation was initially provided through a mix of hotels, BnBs and host families. From May 2022 onwards, households offering accommodation to Ukrainian refugees were eligible to receive an Accommodation Recognition Payment of Euro 400 which was increased to Euro 800 in December 2022 (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). Ukrainian refugees renting on the private rental market are also eligible to receive rent supplements in addition to their welfare payments or income (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). Alongside these supports, the government initiated a new programme aimed at refurbishing vacant housing and building modular housing to provide for the medium- to long-term housing needs of Ukrainian refugees (Murphy and Sheridan, 2023). By October 2023, 204 modular homes were completed in counties Cavan,

Cork, Mayo, Tipperary and Sligo, accommodating a total of 812 Ukrainian refugees (McQuinn, 2023).

The disparate treatment of International protection applicants and Ukrainian refugees in terms of welfare and accommodation provision garnered widespread criticism from academics, civil society organisations and the IHREC (Daly and O'Riordan, 2023). The years 2022 and 2023 also saw a marked increase in anti-refugee protests and arson attacks on accommodation earmarked to house refugees, with IHREC suggesting that the disparate treatment of refugees fuelled at least some of these anti-refugee sentiments (IHREC, 2023a). In 2023, 16 buildings across Ireland were set alight following rumours that these buildings could potentially be used for refugee accommodation (Reynolds, 2024). In that same year, Gardaí policed 235 protests promoting anti-immigration sentiment in the Dublin Metropolitan Region alone (Moore, 2024). While the government strongly condemned these arson attacks, there has been a notable shift in policy direction during this time. For example, in December 2023, the Department of the Taoiseach announced a reduction in welfare payments for temporary protection beneficiaries living in state-provided accommodation from Euro 220 to Euro 38.80. Simultaneously, the Department also announced that state-provided accommodation for temporary protection beneficiaries would only be provided for a period of 90 days from early 2024 onwards (Department of the Taoiseach, 2023). At the time of writing, it was unclear whether this period of 90 days would and could be enforced.

Historically, and as discussed in more detail in the Introduction to this thesis, the number of newly arriving refugees to Ireland has increased and decreased within relatively short periods of time. While governments, including the Irish government, employ migration, reception and integration policies with the aim of controlling the number of individuals seeking asylum, these policies have repeatedly been shown to have only a limited impact on migration flows (Cunniffe et al., 2022). This seems to suggest that governments might be better served to focus on what is in their control, which is to establish reception systems that can flexibly adapt to the ebbs and flows of migratory movements and that allow refugees to find a new home in situations of displacement.

9.6. Concluding Remarks

Refugees face numerous barriers of access to adequate and affordable housing in their countries of resettlement, which negatively impact their ability to make a home 'away from home'. Time spent living in inhumane reception conditions with limited access to social

rights, restricts their access to social, cultural and economic capital, which has long-term consequences for their housing journeys subsequent to gaining status. In Ireland, the period between 2015 and 2021 has seen a significant shift towards ending the current policy of DP and the introduction of more humane reception conditions. However, this period of reform came to an abrupt halt with the end of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2021, coinciding with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led to an unprecedented number of refugees seeking protection in Ireland.

The findings of this research present a nuanced account of refugees' housing journeys in Ireland, with a specific focus on the transition from Direct Provision to housing. As documented, refugees navigated a dual transition; from asylum seeker to refugee and from DP to housing, drawing on their navigational cultural capital and social networks and adapting their practices to the respective housing fields, when making this journey. While the findings of this research point to the continued uncertainties experienced by refugees as they attempt to make a home, they also draw attention to the various ways in which refugees succeeded in finding a sense of belonging despite the ongoing challenges they faced. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the current reception conditions in place in Ireland risk cementing housing exclusion among refugees and, by so doing, contributing to the racialisation of housing disadvantage. It is therefore essential to put home at the centre of refugee housing policy in Ireland by embedding housing provision during the asylum process into mainstream policy initiatives, with a view to enabling the processes of home-making from the point of seeking international protection.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

From Direct Provision to Housing A Study of Housing Experiences of Refugees in Ireland

You are invited to take part in a study about your experiences in housing and searching for housing during and after Direct Provision. Provision.

This information sheet aims to inform you about why this study is being done. It will also explain what it means to be a study participant. Please take the time to read this information carefully before you decide if you would like to take part in the study.

Who am I and what is this study about?

My name is Cordula. I am a PhD student at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

I would like to learn about how families and individuals experience moving from Direct Provision to housing.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will have your personal experiences heard.

It is your personal choice whether you wish to participate in this study. It is completely fine if you decide not to participate.

If you would like to take part in this study or if you have any questions, you can contact me via phone (087 165 1854) or email (bieric@tcd.ie). You can also pass on your contact details to a worker in a service you are attending by telling them to send me your contact details. I will then get in touch with you to arrange a meeting.

Who do I want to talk to?

I want to talk to individuals who have been granted international protection, subsidiary protection or leave to remain during the last five years and who:

- a.) Are living in Direct Provision accommodation; or
- b.) Are currently living in homeless accommodation; or
- c.) Staying with relatives or friends; or
- d.) Are living independently

What does taking part involve?

If you decide to take part in this study, I will arrange to meet with you for an interview (online or in person) at a time and place that suits you best. The interview will take between 60 to 90 minutes.

After the interview, I will ask you whether you want to meet for a second time. For the second meeting, I will ask you to show me your neighbourhood and other places which are important to you during a walk. I will ask you to talk about what the places you show me during the walk mean to you.

You are free to choose whether you want to take part in the interview and/or the walk. This is completely your decision. If you decide not to take part, that is absolutely fine.

What kinds of things will you be asked about in the interview?

During the interview we will talk about the following kinds of issues:

- Your experience of housing since you have arrived in Ireland
- Your experience of seeking housing;
- Your experiences of accessing services when seeking housing outside Direct Provision;
- Your experience of living outside of Direct Provision (if you have moved out)
- Your views on your present and future needs.

Important: You do not have to answer any questions on topics you do not want to talk about. You are free to take a break or to end the interview at any time without giving a reason.

Can you change your mind about taking part in the study?

Yes. You can change your decision to take part in this study. This is possible at any time and you will not need to give a reason.

Is what you say private and confidential?

Yes. Your participation, what you talk about during the interview and the walk, is private and confidential. There is only one exception to this, which is if you tell me that you or someone else is at an immediate risk of harm. Examples of risk of harm would be if you or another person are in danger because of violence or abuse. In that case I may have to report this to the relevant authorities. If this happens, I would first discuss it with you, and we will decide what can be done and who we should tell.

Why do I want to audio-record the interview?

I will only audio-record the interview if you agree to the recording. The recording will help me to have a full account of what you say. You can tell me to stop the recording at any time during the interview.

After the interview, I will listen again to our conversation and type up what we discussed. The audio-recording will be stored on an encrypted hard drive either in a locked cabinet in my office or my home (during the pandemic) that only I and my supervisor will have access

to. The recording and the original images will be destroyed after my dissertation has been examined.

I will make sure that I type up the interview in a way that no one will know who you are. I will assign the interview a code (not your name) and remove all the information that could lead to someone recognizing you (for example, the names of people and places). I will respect your privacy at all times.

It is a possibility that the typed-up interviews will be archived in an online data repository (but only if you give your permission), so that the information you have provided can be used for further research.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be written up for my PhD dissertation. I may also use the results when writing articles or giving presentations at conferences. When presenting the results, I will never mention any real names or places, so that it will not be possible to identify you. If you wish, I will send you a summary of the findings of the research when it is completed.

Who can you contact for further information?

If you have any questions about the study or about what it means to take part in the study, please contact me. You also find below the contact details of my supervisor.

Cordula Bieri (Primary Researcher), Tel: (087) 165 1854 OR EMAIL: bieric@tcd.ie
Paula Mayock (Research Supervisor), Tel: (087) 297 6508 OR EMAIL: pmayock@tcd.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information!

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

- ☐ I understand that participation in the study involves taking part in an interview and/or a walk and/or a photography project with the researcher.
- ☐ I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview, in which case the material will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- ☐ I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially except for cases in which I disclose that I or another person are at risk of harm (for example physical abuse or suicidal intent) or that a serious crime has been committed.
- ☐ I understand that, in any report on the findings of this research, my identity (name and other identifying information) will not be revealed.
- ☐ I understand that 'pieces' from my interview may be used in the research report, conference presentations or published papers.
- ☐ I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm, the researcher may have to report this to a relevant authority.
- ☐ I understand that the signed consent form and the transcript of my interview will be retained on a password-protected computer in a locked office.
- ☐ I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time.
- ☐ I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- ☐ I understand that the findings of the study will be reported and published as a dissertation and/or in academic articles and that a summary of the research findings will be made available to me upon request.
- ☐ I agree that once the study has been completed, parts of my anonymised interview transcript may be archived in an online data repository.

Signed (Participant) _____ **Date** _____

Signed (Researcher) _____ **Date** _____

Researcher Contact Details

Cordula Bieri (Primary Researcher), Tel: (087) 165 1854 OR EMAIL: bieric@tcd.ie

Paula Mayock (Research Supervisor), Tel: (087) 297 6508 OR EMAIL: pmayock@tcd.ie

Appendix C: Service Providers Information Sheet

From Direct Provision to Housing A Study of the Housing Experiences of Refugees in Ireland

Information Sheet for Gatekeepers

I would like you to assist me in conducting a research study on refugees' experiences in housing and searching for housing after Direct Provision. Before you decide whether you can help, it is important that you understand why this study is being done and what taking part in the study will involve for you and prospective participants. Please contact me if you require any further information or have any questions.

Who am I and what is this study about?

My name is Cordula Bieri and I am a PhD researcher at the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. I am conducting a study that aims to explore refugees' housing transitions as they exit the Direct Provision system, including their housing search strategies and the role played by formal services and informal networks during their search for housing.

Why do I contact your service?

You provide services to and are in direct contact with families and individuals who have been granted international protection, subsidiary protection or leave to remain and are living/ have been living in the Direct Provision system. I am therefore seeking your assistance and advice in order to identify and connect me with individuals who are accessing your services. I would be grateful for any guidance or support you might be able to offer, particularly in terms of helping me to establish contact with users of your service who meet the study's eligibility criteria.

To be eligible for participation in the research, individuals will have been granted international protection, subsidiary protection or leave to remain during the past five years; they will have lived in Direct Provision (and may continue to live in DP); they can be male or female and must be over the age of 18 years. Finally, participants may:

- a) Have transitioned to stable housing (e.g. private rental, local authority, home ownership);
- b) Be accessing homelessness services; or
- c) Live in a situation of 'hidden' homelessness, that is, staying temporarily with relatives or friends.

How I am hoping you may be able to help me?

Given your experience with supporting individuals transitioning out of Direct Provision centres, I am asking you to:

- 1.) Identify individuals who fulfil the study's eligibility criteria
- 2.) Distribute an Information Sheet to potential study participants and explain the study to them verbally and what participation involves.
- 3.) 'Connect' me with individuals who show an interest in taking part in the study, either by informing potential participants about how to contact me directly OR, with the individual's consent, you can pass on his/her phone number or email address to me. Potential participants should decide their preferred mode of contact.
- 4.) Allow me to visit your service to establish direct contact with potential participants and to conduct interviews.

What does taking part involve for participants?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If an individual expresses interest in participating I will arrange to meet with that person at your service (if that is possible for you), at an alternative place that suits them best, or arrange an online meeting. During this meeting I will explain the information sheet in detail to ensure that they fully understand the aims of the research and what participation involves.

During the meeting, I will prompt the potential participant to take additional time to consider participation. As soon as a potential participant states that they have decided to take part, the participant and I will agree a date and time to conduct the interview.

The interview will be audio-recorded for the purpose of data transcription and analysis. Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw from participating any time (before, during or after the interview) without giving a reason.

What kinds of things will participants be asked about in the interview?

The following kinds of issues will be discussed during the (face-to-face or online) interview:

- Individual's experiences of accessing services when seeking housing outside of Direct Provision;
- Individuals' experience of seeking housing;
- Individuals' experiences of living outside of Direct Provision (if they have already transitioned)
- Individuals' views on their present and future needs.

Participants will not have to answer any questions on topics they do not want to talk about. They are free to take a break or to end the interview at any time without giving any reason.

In addition to the interview, I will invite participants to show me the places that are meaningful to them – either during a shared walk or by showing me photos they have taken. Participants will be given the option of deciding whether they want to participate only in the interview, only in the walk/photography project or both.

How will the data be handled?

What the participant shares during the interview and the walk will be treated with confidentiality and will not be disclosed to anyone unless the individual indicates that they or another person is a risk of harm. If this happens, I will not report the matter before discussing it with the research participant.

With the participant's consent, I will audio-record the interview. I will turn off the recorder or erase any parts of the recording that the research participant does not want to have recorded.

For online interviews the Microsoft Teams software will be used. Trinity College Dublin IT Services has approved its use for qualitative research interviews.

The audio recordings will be destroyed after the dissertation is examined. Transcripts of the recordings will be anonymised, which means that all identifying information like names or places will be removed. Images, which the participant might share with the researcher, will be anonymised by 'blurring out' any aspects of the image which would lead to the identification of a person. The transcripts and the 'blurred out' images will be destroyed five years after the dissertation is examined.

It is possible that the anonymised interview transcripts will be archived in an online data repository (but only with the participant's consent), so that the information can be used for further research.

Are there any risks or benefits to participating for your service?

There is no risk to your service. The name and identity of the services used as recruitment sites will be concealed in any dissemination or discussion of the research findings.

The potential benefits of this study are difficult to anticipate, and I cannot guarantee a direct benefit to your service or the research participants. However, I will communicate the findings of the study to you and your service in the form of a summary of the main findings and, if deemed beneficial, in the form of a presentation to service staff. It is my hope that the findings of this study will be of interest to your service and that they may help to inform future practice.

What will happen to the information gathered?

The findings of this study will be documented in my dissertation and may also be presented in publications or at conferences, seminars or briefings to interested organisations. I plan to publish the findings in academic journals in order to make them available to wider national and international audiences.

I will ensure that the anonymity of the research participants and of your service will be guaranteed at all times. A summary of the key findings will be made available to all participating services and to the study's participants as soon as the study is completed.

Who can you contact for further information?

If you have any questions about the study or about what it means to take part in the study, please contact me. You also find below the contact details of my supervisor.

Cordula Bieri (Primary Researcher), Tel: (087) 165 1854 OR EMAIL: bieric@tcd.ie

Paula Mayock (Research Supervisor), Tel: (087) 297 6508 OR EMAIL: pmayock@tcd.ie

Thank you for your time and consideration

Appendix D: Interview Guide

(This interview guide is structured into seven main topics, several subtopics and potential probing questions).

1. Opening Question

[Phase 1] Can you tell me a bit about your life at the moment – the area where you live in, a bit about daily life, things like that?

[Phase 2] Could you tell me in your own words about your life since you arrived in Ireland and the places you have lived in? You can take as much time as you want.

2. Arrival in Ireland

- Can you tell me a bit about what these first few weeks and months were like?
- Have you arrived on your own or with family/friends?
- Have you had any prior connections to Ireland before coming here?
- What was your first impression of the country, of the people?
- What kind of legal status did you have? How old were you when you arrived?

3. Direct Provision – What was life in Direct Provision like?

a) What did your days look like?

- Were you involved in any activities? Did you ever get a chance to work or volunteer? Did you have the right to work during your time in DP?
- Have you done any training or further education courses while in DP?
- Were you able to learn English?
- Did you have any care responsibilities?

b) What was it like to live in DP?

- What was your room situation like? If you shared a room what was it like to live together? What was the area like?
- What was the food situation like?
- How would you describe the atmosphere in the DP centre?
- Who would you usually spend your time with? Were you able to make/meet friends?

c) What was the management like?

- How would you describe your relationship to staff/management? Were there any rules? How did you feel about them?

d) What was your financial situation like at that time?

- What was your income situation like? How did you manage financially?
- Have you supported any family abroad financially during this time?
- Have you had any savings when coming to Ireland? Were you able to open a bank account?

e) How did you experience the asylum process?

- Were you subject to Dublin regulations?
- When were you invited to the first interview? Did you ever lodge an appeal?

f) Have you ever moved within DP?

- Do you know the reasons for the move? Was there an element of choice?

- How did you feel about moving? How did the move/s affect your life?
- g) Not staying in DP
 - What made you decide not to stay in DP?
 - What was your life like then? How were you able to sustain yourself? What was your housing situation like?
 - Have you received any support during this time? What kind of support would you have wished for?

4. Gaining Status

- a) What was it like to receive status?
 - How did you feel? What were the weeks like after having received status? What were the main challenges you were facing during this time?
 - Have you sought support from friends or an organisation?
 - Which status have you received? What was the process like to apply for a Residence Permit/GNIB card
- b) Access to welfare/housing payments
 - Have you applied for any welfare payments? What was the application process like? Were there any delays in receiving payments?
 - What kind (if any) support have you received when applying for welfare payments?
 - Have you applied for local authority housing/HAP? What was the process like?
- c) Family reunification
 - Have you applied for family reunification?
 - [if yes] What was it like to apply for family reunification? Have you received any support?
 - [if yes] How are you preparing for your family's arrival? If the family has arrived in Ireland: What were those first weeks like?
- d) What was the search for housing like after you gained status?
 - What kind of challenges did you encounter during this search?
 - Who did you seek advice/support from when searching for housing?
 - When you were searching for housing, what was the most important search criteria to you? (e.g. location, type of accommodation, price, social housing)
 - Were you looking for housing in a particular place, town or village? [If yes] Can you describe what you like about this location? How did you get to know about this location? Do you know any people living there?
- e) Housing search strategies
 - How did you go about searching for housing?
 - Was there a piece of information or advice which you have received that was especially helpful?
 - Were there any specific supports, organisations or people supporting you in your search for housing?
 - If you think back about searching for housing, what kind of support would you have wished for?
- f) Language barriers
 - Have you ever felt that searching for housing is difficult due to language? [If yes] can you describe a situation where you experienced difficulties due to language?
- g) Experiences of discrimination

- Under Irish law, discrimination takes place when one person or a group of persons is treated less favourably than others because of their gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, 'race' (skin colour or ethnic group), sexual orientation, religious belief, membership of the Traveller Community, and/or receiving welfare.
- Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination here in Ireland while searching for housing?
- [if YES] Can you talk more about these situations? How did this affect you?
- Have you reported any incidences of discrimination (e.g. ireport.ie)?

5. Experiences of Housing after Moving out of DP

- What were the first few weeks like after moving?
- What is your housing situation currently like?
 - How do you feel about where you live at the moment? What do you like about it? Are there any things you don't like/things that you would change?
 - Are you living with another person/ with other people? [if YES] How did you meet these people? What is it like to share the accommodation?
- Have you ever experienced any issues with this accommodation?
 - For example, too little space, noise, mould/dampness/leaks, temperature, broken appliances/furniture, break-ins, bad energy/spirits.
 - If yes, how does it impact on your daily life?
- Relationship with landlord
 - What is your landlord like? How would you describe your relationship with your landlord?
 - Have you ever needed some advice or support from your landlord? If something breaks, do you feel comfortable asking your landlord to fix it?
 - Has your landlord registered you with the Residential Tenancies Board?
 - Did you ever need legal support regarding accommodation?
 - Were you ever at risk of losing your accommodation? Have you ever received a notice of tenancy termination?
- Financing rent
 - How much rent do you currently pay? How do you feel about the rent you are currently paying?
 - Are you ever in a situation where you cannot afford to pay the rent? What do you do in these situations?
- How do you manage in terms of money in general?
 - Do you worry about money at the moment/in the past?
 - Is there anyone that you feel you could go to if you were in financial difficulty?
 - Are you financially supporting people who are not living with you?
- The area you are living in
 - What is the area like where you are living in now? What do you like about it? Are there any things you don't like?
 - What are the neighbours like? How would you describe your relationship with your neighbours?
 - If you think about the location of your accommodation. Would you say it is a good location to do the things which are important to you?
 - [if there are kids in the household] *What do you think about the local school/creche your children go to?

- Do you feel safe where you live now? Have you ever experienced any anti-social behaviour/racism/theft?
 - Do you feel like a part of the community here? Have you ever felt like an outsider/excluded from your community?
 - What does integration mean to you?
- h) Housing Future
- Do you think you will stay in this place long-term? Do you have any plans to move in the near future? If yes, where to? And what are the reasons?
 - Do you ever worry about losing your current accommodation?
 - Could you see yourself living in Local Authority housing?
 - Do you ever think about buying a property in Ireland?
 -
- i) For Participants residing in Supported Temporary/Transitional Accommodation
- So you are staying in XXX now, what's it like? (likes and dislike// is there anything you'd change etc.)
 - Are there any rules here? What do you think of them?
 - Have you any friends here? Can you tell me a bit about them?
 - What do you think of the other people staying here?
 - Would you consider yourself homeless at the moment? Would you call this place your home?
 - Moving from here – are there options?

6. Meaning of Home

- When you think of home, what comes to your mind? What does it mean to you to feel at home? Where or when do you feel at home?
- Would you call the place where you live now your home? [if yes] How would you describe what makes you feel at home? [if no] Can you describe a moment when you have felt at home? What do you think it would need for you to feel at home now?

7. Identity and Citizenship / Future

- How would you describe your relationship with Ireland?
- How do you feel about living in Ireland? Would you consider Ireland your home?
- Do you feel part of Irish society? Do you feel accepted? Do you feel you get the space to be yourself here? What about Ireland makes it easy to feel part of Ireland? What makes it difficult?
- Have you applied/ are you considering applying for Irish Citizenship?
- What would it mean to you/What does it mean to you to be an Irish citizen?
- How do you see your future?

Appendix E: Interviewees with an Agenda

The in-depth interview was chosen as a method to elicit concrete descriptions of participants' lived experiences along their housing journeys in Ireland, as well as their reflections on these experiences. It became evident during the interview process that a significant number of the participants had reflected extensively on their experiences, particularly on the time they had spent in the Direct Provision system, and took the interview as an opportunity to advocate for change to the system. These participants shared their reflections with a specific agenda, which made it challenging, at times, to elicit concrete descriptions of life events.

While it is recognised that individuals who are part of financial or political elites may adhere to a particular agenda when answering questions in a research or interview context (Thuesen, 2011), Jacobsson and Åkerström (2013) make the case that “any interview may be understood as a site for doing public or political work” (Jacobsson and Åkerström, 2013, p.720) and go on to explain that some participants position themselves as ambassadors for a group by using the collective ‘we’ when responding to questions (Jacobsson and Åkerström, 2013). Although only one participant repeatedly used the term ‘we’ during the interview, several accounts displayed a tendency to recount instances of events witnessed while residing in DP that aligned with a specific argumentative intention.

As documented in Chapter 5 of this thesis, participants consistently expressed how their sense of privacy, autonomy, and dignity was under constant threat throughout their stay in the Direct Provision system. Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter 1, the interviews took place in a highly politicised context: organisations such as the Movement for Asylum Seekers in Ireland (MASI), refugee advocacy organisations, Irish citizens and government officials like the Ombudsman for Children were continuously highlighting the plight of asylum seekers living in the DP system. At the start of the data collection phase of the research in October 2019, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality was in the process of writing a report on the DP system, which was published in December of that year (Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, 2019). Some of the study's participants had experience of publicly speaking out about their experiences, through art, by giving television, radio or newspaper interviews, writing, giving workshops or speaking at conferences while others were involved in advocacy work using social media. It is therefore not surprising that participants would view participation in the research as a way or means to share their experiences and voice their opinions.

By articulating their theorisations participants were arguably attempting to challenge existing doxa, the aspects of a field that are tacitly accepted as ‘natural’; in this case, specifically the system of DP (Bourdieu, 1977, p.169). As Bourdieu argues, people who are situated in lower positions within social hierarchies have a particularly strong incentive to question these hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1977). Another factor that may have contributed to the continued questioning of existing hierarchies on the part of participants was their status as refugees itself. A willingness to speak up and to take political action to change matters in their home countries was for some participants the reason why they were forced to flee. This willingness to challenge the status quo was then also reflected in participants’ accounts of the injustices they had experienced in Ireland and of the efforts they made to change the DP system.

Interviews in which interviewees bring in too much of their own agenda are at times considered ‘failed’ interviews (Jacobsson and Åkerström, 2013), which did, at times, make me question my interviewing skills because I felt, in some instances, that I did not succeed in sufficiently eliciting narrations of lived experiences. On the other hand, participants having an agenda also posed some important ethical questions in terms of managing expectations. Although I made sure to repeatedly emphasise that the findings of a research project such as this one were unlikely to have any positive impact, in the short or medium term, some participants were certainly motivated to participate because they felt it was important to try to raise awareness and educate by telling their story. This suggests that participation in the research project was potentially underpinned by participants’ assumption that the researcher would have more political and social capital and therefore “the power to effect change” (Darling, 2014, p.208) which posed an ethical dilemma as the researcher was not in a position to fulfil these expectations.

Appendix F: Dealing with Emotions

The matter of how to deal with and respond to emotional reactions on the part of participants was one that surfaced repeatedly during the data collection process. It is well-established that listening to difficult and traumatic experiences can be challenging and even cause vicarious trauma for the listener (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Fenge et al., 2019; Kiyimba and O'Reilly, 2016; Ratnam, 2019). Despite this knowledge, qualitative researchers might not have adequate supports and training to effectively manage these emotional situations (Fenge et al., 2019). Prior to undertaking this study, I had some experience of doing qualitative research on difficult topics and, in general, felt well prepared to handle the interview situations at an emotional level. Guided by the 'do no harm' principle (Catriona Mackenzie et al., 2007), my main concern was for the well-being of the research participants. Looking back, however, I feel that participants may have been better prepared than I was for the interview situation since they were familiar with their stories and had control over what they wanted to disclose. In contrast, as an interviewer, I had limited control over what I would hear during the telling of these stories.

During the course of one interview, the participant became particularly angry about the lack of support he received when he was experiencing homelessness. This emotional interview situation left me drained and with a sense of deep sadness. Despite being able to reflect on these feelings with colleagues, I was not able to shake the feeling that the sadness I felt was the result of not having handled the participant's emotional reaction appropriately, or that I did not ask the right questions. While I tried to find a rational explanation for my emotions by writing reflective field notes, I remained concerned that this sadness and the fear of doing something wrong could have a negative impact on subsequent interviews. This episode was an important 'moment' in that it led to the realisation that I needed more structured support in place in order to continue interviewing with confidence. I was fortunate to find this support in the form of a trained psychologist who supported me in regularly debriefing after conducting interviews. These meetings provided me with the space and strategies to deal, in a constructive way, with participants' and my own emotions arising from interviews, and also proved helpful when transcribing and coding the interviews (Kiyimba and O'Reilly, 2016). This support was hugely beneficial in that it provided me with the skills to handle emotionally difficult interview situations more compassionately and the confidence to ask questions without feeling afraid of the response.

Appendix G: Case Summary Template

From Direct Provision to Housing – the Lived Experiences of Refugees in Ireland Case Summary Template

ID:

Pseudonym:

Age:

Country of Origin:

Date and location of interview:

Date and location of walk:

Housing History in Ireland

Arrival in Ireland

- All narratives in relation to the first few weeks of arrival
- Including time before applying for asylum

Life in Direct Provision / Experience of Asylum Process

- All narratives/data in relation to life in Direct Provision
- Experience of DP
- Relationships with other Residents/Roommates/Staff
- Activities while staying in DP
- Perspectives on Direct Provision
- Perspectives on impact of Direct Provision

Experience of the Asylum Process

- All narratives/data in relation to the asylum process

Gaining Status

- Narratives in relation to accessing Job Seekers payments/HAP/GNIB card
- Application for family reunification (if applicable)

Housing Journey after DP

- All narratives/data in relation to housing journey after DP, including experiences of homelessness, private rental market, social housing.
- Experiences of moving
- Narratives/data in relation to affording rent
- Relationship with landlords
- Current living situation

- Views on housing market/references to housing crisis

Experiences of Place/Neighbourhood

- Any narratives/data in relation to neighbourhood including experiences of crime/harassment, places frequently visited.

Searching for Housing

Experiences of housing support services

- All reports of services used when searching for housing
- Finding out about services
- Reason for using/not using a service
- Experiences of service

Social Networks

- All reports of accessing social networks when searching for housing

Other Search Strategies

- All other search strategies, e.g. searching online.

Discrimination on the Housing Market

- Any experiences of discrimination, based on HAP, unemployment, ethnicity, religion and so on

Family

Family

- All data on family life, past and present, living with and/or abroad

Education/Training/Employment

Education, Training, Employment

- Any experiences of learning English
- Experiences relating to education/training
- Employment history

Social Networks

Social Networks & Relationships

- Friends and Friendships, in and outside of the country.
- Contacts to volunteers

Experiences with services

- All reports of services used (apart from housing support services)
- Finding out about services
- Reason for using/not using a service
- Experiences of service

Everyday Activities

- All narratives/data in relation to everyday activities, including Food, Sport, Religion and Art

Health

Physical Health

- Reports of physical health issues
- Reports of health service utilisation

Mental Health

- Reports of anxiety/worry
- Reports of upsetting/traumatic events
- Reports of feeling down, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation
- Mental health service utilisation

Identity, Self and the Future

Identity and Self

- Refugee 'identity' (does the person self-identify as a refugee?)
- Meanings attached to 'refugee'
- Irish identity (does the person self-identify as Irish?)
- Meanings attached to 'Irish'
- Any expression of self-identity as ethnic minority, religious minority, LGBTIQ etc.

Integration

- Meanings attached to 'integration'

The Future

- Hopes/aspirations re. housing, education, employment
- Fears about housing, homelessness in the future
- Worry or anxiety about any aspect of the future
- Positive aspects of the future

Appendix H: Chronological Housing Journeys (Example)

August 2014 | 18y, sister (16)

RR 15 ①

staying at the hospital

quarantine due to Ebola risk
isolation, only contact to doctors

House for unaccompanied minors

2 months

house for unaccompanied minors

'it was a good place! they take care of us'

Foster care 1 month

temporary at the sister's foster family's place
no access to education due to age
nothing to do

not allowed to go into each others rooms

DP Centre 1

having to adapt fast, living on his own, dealing with separation from sister
missing meals due to admin/college. living on 10th floor
having his own room possibly due to age.

after 1.5y sister joins in as she turns 18

DP 1

Refugee Support Project

focusing on education, support by
playing pool, no privacy when having guests (e.g. sister)
meeting people from different countries, like neighbours not friends
sister had surgery and needed a level place (e.g. no stairs)
bedbugs

DP Centre 2

Self-catering
studio flat, sharing with sister
about 120 € a week
would

DP Centre 2

closes in June 2018

DP Centre 3

meeting like-minded people (music collaborations)
self-catering
starting to live, a normal life
starting in with support of student union president

* going status (subsidiary protection)
October 2018
Minister: December 2018

searching for housing for more than a year
'ups and downs of disappointment'

studio
City Centre
Dublin 6

1245 (330 HRP)

'I didn't mind the size because it was clean' 'no boys, no would'
lonely, but also joy
friends close by
quiet path, noise complaint after living in
'only got this place for college'