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Navigating housing beyond arrival

The trajectories of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Introduction

Since the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, intra-EU migration has increased significantly. Many EU countries now rely heavily on migrants from other member states for low-paid flexible labour to meet the demands of neoliberal employment markets (McCollum & Findlay, 2018). Because their stay is often treated as temporary—by employers, governments, and the migrants themselves—the provision of stable housing tends to be an afterthought, if considered at all (Baalbergen, 2024; Ulcelușe et al., 2022). Amidst an ongoing housing crisis in many European countries, this means EU labour migrants are frequently entangled in struggles over housing access, affordability, and precarity (Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021; Lombard, 2023).

A case in point is the Netherlands, where EU labour migrants' housing struggles are both widespread and persistent (Baalbergen, 2024; Manting et al., 2025). The Dutch labour market is extremely flexible in terms of employment contracts and demand for migrant labour is high (Timmerman, 2025; Van Stiphout-Kramer et al., 2024). In 2012, a Parliamentary Commission sounded the alarm on the concerning housing and working situations of recent Central and Eastern European migrants in the Netherlands (Koopmans, 2012). They pointed to the large number of mala fide employment agencies, substandard housing conditions, overcrowding, and exploitation. Accommodation was often tied to employment, meaning migrants could lose their housing if the job ended. Eight years later, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic uncovered that many of these problems signalled in 2012 had persisted. Overcrowded shared housing facilities did not provide enough space to social distance, and job loss due to the pandemic resulted in the termination of temporary housing contracts: unsafe and degrading housing conditions made the national news¹. Again, a Parliamentary Commission was established that concluded that extreme misconducts and substandard living conditions were still present (Roemer, 2020). Although several of the commission's recommendations have been implemented, concerns about the housing conditions of labour migrants remain (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2023).

This thesis focusses on the housing conditions of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands. Existing studies on labour migrants housing conditions primarily focus on the challenging conditions upon arrival. With little knowledge of the local context, limited economic resources, and few local social ties (Ryan, 2011), migrants

1 <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/brand-in-den-haag-legt-misstanden-bij-arbeidsmigranten-bloot-wij-hebben-vaak-geen-zicht-op-wie-waar-woont-bc07509b/>
<https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/hoe-kunnen-meer-dan-vijftig-roemeense-migranten-in-limburg-ineens-zijn-verdwenen-bc37bb64/>
<https://nos.nl/artikel/2390392-arbeidsmigranten-slapen-in-tenten-ze-kunnen-nergens-heen>

often depend on intermediaries, particularly employment agencies that bundle work, housing, and other essential services into a single package (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Sørensen, 2013; Sporton, 2013; Szytniewski & Van der Haar, 2022). While such arrangements facilitate initial settlement, they also involve limited employment rights, no tenancy protections, and increased vulnerability to dependency and exploitation. In addition, EU labour migrants are increasingly arriving in rural and suburban areas that frequently lack the resources and infrastructure to adequately accommodate newcomers (Haandrikman et al., 2024; King et al., 2021; McAreavey, 2012; McAreavey & Argent, 2018; Rye & Slettebak, 2020).

In contrast with common assumptions, a considerable number of labour migrants settle long-term (Engbersen et al., 2013). Little is known, however, about how EU migrant housing struggles—such as precarity and dependence on intermediaries—unfold over time. Traditional theories of migrant housing trajectories (Massey et al., 1993; Park & Burgess, 1925/1967) and life course studies on housing (Borjas, 2002; Magnusson Turner & Hedman, 2014; Sinning, 2010; Vono-de-Vilhena & Bayona-Carrasco, 2012; Zorlu et al., 2014) engage with longitudinal aspects, but focus predominantly on identifying general patterns and differences in homeownership levels. This offers limited insight into alternative trajectories, particularly how they are produced, how they are experienced, and what their long-term implications may be. Moreover, longitudinal studies on migrant housing have primarily focused on asylum migrants (e.g., Aigner, 2019; Bragg & Hiebert, 2022; De Hoon et al., 2021; Lacroix & Bertrand, 2024; Ribera-Almandoz et al., 2024; Vogiazides & Chihaya, 2020) while EU labour migrants—despite being the largest group of migrants in many European countries (De Haas, 2023)—remain an understudied population in life course studies on housing. EU labour migrants nevertheless present an interesting case: they have the right to free mobility in any EU country, but do not get access to welfare services such as overnight homelessness shelters like native citizens do, nor priority access to social housing like asylum seekers have². This means they are disproportionally confronted with precarious housing conditions and dependence on non-governmental intermediaries.

With the aim of providing a more granular understanding of the housing conditions of labour migrants, I bring together perspectives from life course studies and migration infrastructure scholarship. While the former offers a longitudinal conceptual lens on housing, the latter is particularly suited to foreground the plural and relational nature of migrant experiences. The following question guides this research:

2 Refugees have the right to priority access to the waiting lists of social housing in the Netherlands. However, at the moment of writing this introduction the national government is preparing a bill to ban this priority access (Rijksoverheid, 2025), which will likely result in stagnating the outflow from the already overfull asylum centres.

How do the housing conditions of EU labour migrants change over time in diverse ways?

To answer this question, I employ a unique longitudinal mixed-method approach. I analyse calendar time and material housing conditions through a quantitative analysis of Dutch population data on all registered EU labour migrants in the Netherlands, defined as adult individuals who were born in another EU country, migrated to the Netherlands, and subsequently took up employment there. I explore the lived experiences of housing temporalities and invisible housing practices, such as informal housing and homelessness, through biographical interviews with Polish migrants, the largest group of EU migrants in the Netherlands. Their longer migration history provides an insightful case to examine experiences over time. While this dissertation consistently refers to labour migrants, this terminology reflects a registered reality obscuring that actual migration motives are often complex and multifaceted, combining reasons such as employment, relationships, and other personal aspirations. Nevertheless, the label serves a heuristic purpose, highlighting differences within this commonly homogenised group, while also engaging with public and academic debates on the housing situation of labour migrants.

Studying migrant housing conditions is about more than just housing. It offers a window into the daily experiences of migrants that encompass work, care, community, and the negotiation of belonging in a new society. Housing is a fundamental human need that extends beyond material shelter. It can provide a space to build a life: to invite friends, to maintain a family, practice cultural and religious traditions, and rest and recuperate from that same life (Mallett, 2004). The findings of this research are therefore as much about the lives of labour migrants in Europe as they are about housing itself.

The research consists of four empirical studies, each presented as an individual chapter. In the following sections, the studies are situated within the broader literature on migrant housing, followed by an explanation of the conceptual and methodological approach underpinning the empirical findings, and an outline of how the studies align to form a coherent overall contribution.

Literature review

In this section I provide a brief overview of current scholarly understandings of migrant housing conditions and introduce a life course approach to housing and migration infrastructure scholarship. I examine its merits and limitations, culminating in the development of the conceptual framework that guides this dissertation. Further extensive engagement with literature on migrant housing conditions recurs consistently in the relevant chapters.

Migrant housing conditions

The home is central to the migratory experience. Migration involves a radical departure of home³ in search of a new place to settle, “splitting (...) home as place of origin and home as the sensory world of everyday experience” (Ahmed, 1999:341). This includes both a spatial departure, often leaving behind a material house, as well as an emotional and social departure, distancing oneself from social ties and memories. Yet, research focusing specifically on migrant housing conditions remains relatively limited and fragmented (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). The home is often treated as a secondary element rather than the core subject of investigation (Boccagni, 2017), especially in literature on labour migrants, which tends to centre around employment conditions (De Lange et al., 2019; McCollum & Findlay, 2015; Strockmeijer et al., 2019; Timmerman, 2025).

The limited literature that does focus on labour migrants’ housing conditions highlights their struggles in accessing adequate and secure housing (Boccagni, 2014; Lombard, 2023). Key contributing factors to their housing challenges include legal status, restrictive regulations that limit access to welfare and housing support, limited or absent social networks, scarce tacit knowledge on the local context, discrimination, devaluation of skills and education, insecure employment arrangements and the bundling of accommodation to employment (Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021; Lombard, 2023; Lukes et al., 2018; Usman et al., 2021). As a result, migrants are disproportionately affected by housing precarity, as is further underscored by research on migrant homelessness (Mostowska, 2013, 2014; D. Robinson, 2010).

At the same time, migrants are a highly diverse group who encounter different housing opportunities and challenges (Özüekren & Van Kempen, 2002). Migrant positions are complex, shaped by the interplay of various social axes such as gender,

3 This does not necessarily mean that past homes are emotionally or financially left behind. Literature on transnational home practices shows how migrants maintain ties across countries, feeling at home in multiple places, for example through building ‘remittance’ homes in the country of origin (Boccagni, 2014).

nationality, race, legal status, and class (McDowell, 2015; Wessendorf, 2018). While it is widely acknowledged that housing conditions differ significantly between, for example, refugees, highly mobile elite migrants, and low-paid labour migrants, there is less understanding of the differences that exist within these broad categories. Moreover, migrants' positions are not fixed; they change over time and, with these changes, housing struggles can accumulate, shift, or recede (Özüekren & Van Kempen, 2002).

Few studies address temporality in migrant housing, and those that do typically address it by examining how housing experiences in countries-of-origin shape present-day aspirations and experiences. Cultural norms about what constitutes a 'good' home play a significant role in informing these aspirations (Boccagni, 2017). This is evident, for example, in Indian migrants' search for the rare, detached home in Helsinki (Eskelä, 2018), or in the preference among Italians in London for spaces that foster sociality and commensality (Maslova & King, 2020). There are also some studies on the strategies and future housing aspirations of migrants. Lombard (2023), for example, shows how many labour migrants in the UK see their poor housing conditions as temporary and as a strategy to achieve something better in the future. This echoes earlier findings, such as Dahya's (1974) study of Pakistani immigrants in the UK, or Boccagni's study on Ecuadorian labour migrants in Italy (2014). These studies focus on migrants' early arrival years and do not examine the extent to which housing conditions improve, nor the emotional or personal toll this improvement may entail. A notable exception is Balampanidis (2019), who analyses the housing pathways of immigrant homeowners in Athens, showing that, despite local obstacles, they were able to upgrade their housing conditions. Its exclusive focus on homeowners, however, overlooks other migrant housing trajectories, such as those who rent or take on shared housing. Taken together, these studies point to the need for research that more accurately captures labour migrants' diverse housing experiences over time. This dissertation contributes to such an understanding.

Life course approaches to housing

Much literature that explicitly analyses longitudinal patterns in housing experiences typically falls under life course scholarship. A life course approach focuses on understanding the patterns of events and transitions that shape an individual's everyday life (Bailey, 2009; Elder et al., 2003). Central to a life course perspective to housing is the idea that transitions in life domains, such as employment or family formation, can trigger residential moves and vice versa (Coulter, 2023). Moreover, the timing, duration, and sequence of housing events and states influence how they shape the broader life trajectory (W. Clark et al., 2003). For example, the age at which

someone enters homeownership, or the length of a particular housing phase such as renting, can significantly affect future housing pathways.

The life course approach in housing studies can be dated back to the landmark housing life-cycle model of Rossi (1955). Rossi argued that the most important factors explaining residential behaviour were changes in the life cycle, such as marrying, childbirth, children leaving the parental home, divorce, or the passing of a partner. This study marked a significant departure from the dominant neoclassical explanations of the time, which analysed residential behaviour from an aggregated and economic perspective. Instead, Rossi brought the decision-making processes of individual households into focus. As he was primarily interested in advancing his own methodological approach, he did not aim to generalise his findings (a limitation he discusses at length). For example, he specifically selected neighbourhoods with a low number of migrants and African Americans, as these populations were known to have higher mobility rates. Furthermore, “a preference was given to the male adults” of the household to participate in the survey (Rossi, 1955:16). Given Rossi’s methodological choices, it is perhaps not surprising that the model overlooks the diverse ways in which people make residential decisions, particularly those of marginalised populations and minorities. It therefore downplays both specific (cultural) preferences and the structural constraints and power dynamics faced by racialised and classed groups that disrupt the housing life-cycle model.

Many contemporary studies approaching housing from a life course perspective echo these limitations and focus on dominant housing trajectories towards homeownership (Borjas, 2002; Magnusson Turner & Hedman, 2014; Sinning, 2010; Vono-de-Vilhena & Bayona-Carrasco, 2012; Zorlu et al., 2014), leaving open important questions on how alternative housing trajectories are experienced and shaped. Renting is often treated as a temporary and homogeneous stage, rather than a varied and sometimes permanent tenure. This also overlooks the diversity within rental arrangements, which can include private, social, shared, and informal tenures (Druta et al., 2021; Maalsen, 2020). These limitations are becoming increasingly recognised in the wake of austerity measures and the ongoing housing crisis in the Global North, both of which have made the housing ladder an exception rather than the standard. Norms such as homeownership (Ronald, 2008), once central to the model, are now out of reach for large segments of the population. In response, numerous studies have explored the stagnating, chaotic, or otherwise diverse housing careers, though these typically focus on young people rather than migrant populations (Arundel & Doling, 2017; Bobek et al., 2020; Coulter et al., 2020; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015; Howard et al., 2024; Lennartz et al., 2016). One important exception is Manting et al., (2022), who found that, among migrants from

seven EU countries, only a small fraction achieves homeownership. They argue that housing trajectories vary widely, with shared housing serving as both a temporary arrangement and a long-term condition, using this fact to call for more extensive research into the trajectories of EU migrants.

In addition, the broader social relations that influence residential decisions are still often overlooked, despite influential studies that have enriched life course approaches to housing by situating them within a structural context (Clapham, 2002; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). While one of the core principles of a life course approach is its consideration of how lives are 'linked' to those of others (Elder et al., 2003), this is typically limited to familial relationships, neglecting other influential ties, particularly those involving landlords, employers, or other actors in positions of power (Coulter et al., 2016). As a result, questions of power and inequality remain underexplored. Coulter and colleagues therefore argue for a reconceptualisation of residential (im)mobility as "relational practices that link lives together and connect people to structural conditions through time and space" (Coulter et al., 2016:367). Central to this relational approach towards residential mobility, is the way this manages to draw attention to the embodied and active nature of residential moves, as well as their sensitivity to power relations.

To summarise, the core strength of the life course perspective in housing analysis is that it attends to multiple housing states and transitions, rather than focusing solely on a single housing arrangement or move at a given time. In addition, it stresses the need to study housing in relation to other life course domains, including employment and family dynamics. Yet, there is still a lack of understanding of non-normative housing trajectories, particularly those of labour migrants. Moreover, there is a clear need for more research into the multiple relations that influence housing trajectories. This is especially important for labour migrants, who disproportionately depend on intermediaries to find housing in a new, and often unfamiliar, context.

Migration infrastructure

To advance such a relational approach to housing trajectories, I draw on scholarship concerning the 'infrastructure' of migration. Lindquist and his colleagues define migration infrastructures as "the institutions, networks, and people that move migrants from one point to another" (Lindquist et al., 2012:9). These infrastructures can both facilitate and restrict migrant mobilities and are experienced differently depending on migrants' positionalities. For example, access to aeroplanes, visa documents, the Internet, as well as social networks, can enable smooth, safe, and legal migration, while their absence may lead to vastly different routes, often of a more dangerous and precarious nature. Lindquist et al., (2012) propose a

broad conceptualisation of migration infrastructure that includes commercial, regulatory, technological, humanitarian, and social dimensions. While these individual dimensions have each been studied extensively, their contribution lies in highlighting how it is the interplay among them that shapes migration trajectories and experiences.

Most studies on migration mediation focus on departure and transit processes, analysing the roles of recruitment agencies (Beech, 2018; Lindquist, 2017; McCollum & Findlay, 2018; Tuxen & Robertson, 2019), government actors, humanitarian actors (Schemschat, 2024), smugglers (Van Liempt, 2007), and other intermediaries who facilitate border crossings or provide support along migration routes (Düvell, 2018; Martin, 2005). More recently, some authors have begun to explore mediation processes within arrival contexts (Meeus et al., 2019), including access to housing (Aaron, 2024; Hanhörster & Wessendorf, 2020; Robertson, 2017). These studies highlight how the place of arrival contains important support infrastructures. Traditionally this predominantly concerned metropolitan areas, but also urban peripheries and rural locales are increasingly taken into consideration (Boost & Oosterlynck, 2019; El-Kayed et al., 2020; Wessendorf & Gembus, 2024). The concept of migration infrastructures also has a strong temporal element. It is assumed that mediation does not only shape opportunities in a specific moment (such as arrival) but also shapes migrants future mobilities (Lindquist et al., 2012; Meeus et al., 2019).

Conceptual approach to migrant housing trajectories

I bring the concept of migration infrastructure into the context of housing in the receiving country and extend its application beyond the arrival phase. In doing so, I aim to place this body of scholarship into conversation with life course approaches to housing. Together this offers a more fine-grained understanding of migrant housing trajectories. I adopt a conceptual approach structured around three analytical lenses: temporality, relationality, and plurality.

First, a *temporally* sensitive lens is needed to understand the dynamic and processual nature of migrant housing. Moving beyond the point of arrival, I build upon traditional life course approaches to look at housing transitions, sequences, and life events longitudinally (Coulter, 2023; Elder et al., 2003; Mulder & Hooimeijer). I also follow recent qualitative approaches to the life course that show how time is not just linear and chronological, but lived, with messy workings and logics in different directions (Barron, 2021; Hall, 2021; Tefera & Gamlen, 2024; Van Lanen, 2022; Wilkinson & Ortega-Alcázar, 2019a). This includes periods of waiting, entrapment, and mundane 'events' that can have important implications for housing trajectories

and the broader life course. Bringing together the different ways in which time and the life course are understood and measured is central in my approach.

Secondly, a *relational* lens is needed, understood as the multitude of social relations that shape housing conditions and experiences (Clapham, 2002; Coulter et al., 2016). Drawing on the migration infrastructure scholarship, as discussed above, this dissertation defines migrant trajectories as not only made up out of individual decisions, but co-produced through a variety of social and institutional relations. Most existing research has focused on close kin such as partners or parents. To expand the scope, this dissertation includes a broader array of intermediary actors and institutions, such as roommates, extended family, friends, government bodies, housing providers, employers, and mortgage advisors. Seeking to understand how they shape resources and constrains, I aim to deepen knowledge on how intermediaries structure housing trajectories at different points in time.

Finally, *plurality* is necessary to capture the varied and uneven character of migrant housing trajectories. As discussed above, traditional theories have centred on the succession model of international migration, which describes how migrants move upward through the housing market and urban space as their socioeconomic status improves over time (Massey & Denton, 1985; Park & Burgess, 1925). These models rest on assumptions of relatively uniform housing trajectories (Rossi, 1955) and homogenous migrant groups. Although it is important to recognise that diversity has always been present (Ndhlovu, 2016; Schinkel, 2018), research shows a level of unprecedented population diversity in the Global North, not only by place of origin, but especially along other axes such as legal status, socio-economic status, and culture (Grillo, 2015). This has led many scholars to argue for moving beyond ethnic or national categories as the primary units of analysis (Biehl, 2020; Finn & Mayock, 2022; Glick Schiller, 2008; Wessendorf, 2018). Furthermore, critiques of homogenising categorisation emphasise the need to attend to inter-group variance. The plural lens adopted in this thesis works in two ways: by acknowledging the plurality of migrant experiences, it also highlights the plurality of housing trajectories.

Case study context, methods, and data

My research focuses on the housing trajectories of EU migrants in the Netherlands. The importance of EU labour migration in the Netherlands has increased significantly since the country began opening its labour market to new EU member states in 2004. Between 2004 and 2023, the number of EU labour migrants arriving annually in the Netherlands rose from approximately 6,000 to 44,000 (CBS, 2025). In 2024, around 650,000 EU labour migrants were registered, although this number varies

significantly depending on the definitions and methodologies used (Obermann, 2023). Registration is not required for those staying less than four months, and, in practice, many do not register even when staying longer, making it likely that the true number is higher.

EU labour migrants form a diverse group. In 2024, the largest group came from Poland, followed by Germany and Bulgaria. Key employment sectors include agriculture, logistics, services, and business. Around 40% of EU labour migrants work via employment agencies (CBS, 2024a), compared to just 10% of the overall working population (Vervliet & Klinker, 2024). Since the 1980s and 1990s, the Dutch labour market has undergone significant reforms, becoming increasingly flexible in terms of employment contracts and labour relations. This flexibility has made it attractive to employ labour migrants on a temporary or seasonal basis (Van Stiphout-Kramer et al., 2024). The Netherlands was also the first country to fully liberalise the employment agency sector, giving these agencies a central role in recruitment, employment, and housing of migrants (Timmerman, 2025).

In recent years, the precarious housing conditions of labour migrants have received increasing public and policy attention, particularly concerning the role of employment agencies. Tying housing to employment creates a vulnerable situation, where job loss can lead directly to homelessness. Reports of overcrowding, inadequate facilities, lack of privacy, and poor housing conditions in agency-provided accommodation have been extensively documented (Roemer, 2020). However, not all labour migrants live in employer-provided housing. Although detailed data is scarce, an online survey found that 69% of labour migrants lived independently of their employer—60% among low-qualified workers and 90% among highly-qualified workers (Sobczyk & Cremers, 2023).

Those living independently reside in regular housing stock, which includes social housing, the private rental sector, and owner-occupied homes. The Dutch housing market has undergone extensive neoliberal reforms in recent decades, resulting in the relative decline of the social rental sector (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020). At the same time, rising house prices and stagnating homeownership rates have led to a growing prevalence of shared housing, particularly among labour migrants (Manting et al., 2022). How labour migrants navigate these circumstances, especially beyond and after agency housing, merits further research.

Methodological strategy: mixed method research

To capture the different understandings of migrant trajectories - material, registered and chronological, as well as lived, informal and nonlinear - I use a mixed-method

research approach. Mixed methods should not be seen as simply the combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, but as a distinct research methodology with its own epistemological and ontological considerations. I draw on critical demography (Ortega, 2023), appreciating the value of quantitative methodologies and large-scale datasets such as population registers, while critically interrogating questions of inequality, difference, and the challenges of categorisation and measurement. I argue that 'data' can come from a wide range of sources, including population statistics, interviews, observations, and more intangible elements, such as meanings and affects. By capturing multiple types of data, I aim to synthesise a more rich understanding of migrant housing trajectories. Ultimately, the research for this thesis adopts a two-phase sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This means that the study begins with a quantitative analysis, followed by a qualitative phase to further explain and deepen the understanding of the initial findings. These analyses are presented as separate chapters, each using one method, and then 'mixed' and integrated in the conclusion.

Quantitative research

The three proposed analytical lenses to migrant housing - temporality, relationality, and plurality - are central in the further operationalisation of the quantitative phase. I address the temporality of housing conditions through sequence and cluster analyses of Dutch population register data. These are quantitative, life course-inspired techniques that enable longitudinal analysis using annual measurements. This approach allows for highly detailed insights, including associations with spatial and individual variables. It further supports findings that are generalisable to the entire registered population, something difficult to achieve with qualitative interviews alone. Moreover, register data is especially suitable for retrospective research: where personal memories can fade or become distorted over time, register data follows a chronological and systematic timeline.

Two main dimensions of migrant housing are central to this longitudinal quantitative analysis: spatial location and housing tenure. Spatial location is operationalised by analysing the annual place of residence, distinguishing between rural areas, suburban/small cities, and larger cities. I select these categories because of their varying types and degrees of migration (arrival) infrastructures, enabling a quantitative analysis of the second analytical lens - relationality - of migrant housing trajectories. Housing tenure is categorised as homeownership, non-shared social rental, non-shared private rental, shared residency with non-family members, and informal housing, representing tenures with varying degrees of tenure security. The third and final analytical lens - plurality - is explored through logistic regression

analyses of differences among labour migrants, identifying how spatial and tenure-based housing trajectories vary across socio-demographic and contextual variables.

The research population includes all registered adult EU labour migrants in the Netherlands who came to the Netherlands between 2011 and 2014 for the first time. I defined labour migrants as those who are employed or self-employed in the Netherlands within two years after migration. This deviates from the definition used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS, n.d.), which only includes migrants who find work within 120 days and excludes those (predominantly women) who follow a partner who migrated earlier. I opted for a broader definition here to also include individuals who need more time to secure employment in the Netherlands or who arrived as part of a couple. I excluded students and migrants from outside the EU to limit the analysis to migrants operating under the same 'mobility regime' (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). They are subject to the same rules and regulations, such as freedom of movement and employment within the EU, and exclusion from certain welfare services, such as access to homeless shelters.

Qualitative research

Dutch register data provides a detailed picture of who moved and where they went. What it does not capture are the places people dreamed of moving to, what they sacrificed to afford a home, who helped them along the way, or how they felt when they finally received the keys. Nor does it capture many hidden informal housing arrangements that are not officially registered. These factors play a crucial role in understanding migrants' housing trajectories, inspiring the second, qualitative phase of this research.

Again, the three analytical lenses serve as the basis for further methodological development. The temporality of migrant housing is studied qualitatively through biographical interview techniques (Hubbard, 2000). In these in-depth interviews, respondents were asked to reflect on their past housing experiences and negotiations, allowing for a lived perspective on the patterns identified in the first, quantitative phase. I address relationality by asking respondents about their interactions with various actors and organisations within the migration infrastructures they encountered throughout their trajectories. In contrast to the quantitative phase, which focused on all EU migrants, the third analytical lens, plurality, was explored qualitatively by focusing on a single ethnic group: Polish migrants. By keeping this 'variable' constant, it becomes possible to highlight other axes of difference beyond country of origin.

I chose to research Polish migrants during the qualitative dimension of this study for three reasons. First, migration from Poland to the Netherlands has grown significantly over the past two decades, with many migrants now having lived in the country for extended periods. This enables a reconstruction of housing trajectories over several years. Second, they form the largest group among EU migrants arriving in the Netherlands. Third, existing research has highlighted how Polish migrants in the Netherlands often encounter challenging housing conditions and depend frequently on employment agencies for accommodation (Roemer, 2020). The interviews with migrants were supplemented by conversations with professionals in the field of migrant housing and by short-term fieldwork in a homeless shelter for EU migrants. Geographically, this part of the research took place in North Holland, a region selected for its central role in the Dutch (and global) economy. The province includes the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam, which hosts a large number of labour migrants (Tepiç et al., 2024), and encompasses diverse employment sectors that rely on migrant labour, including the flower industry, construction, services, and finance. The region also offers a mix of urbanisation levels and access to services, although no truly peripheral areas are present within the province. Finally, North Holland remains relatively under-researched in the context of labour migration, especially compared to areas such as The Hague or more peripheral rural regions. Although respondents were living in North Holland at the time of the interview, their housing trajectories do span the entire country.

All respondents provided verbal consent after the purpose of the research was explained. I chose to avoid written consent forms as these might alarm participants in vulnerable situations. Interviews were recorded unless respondents preferred otherwise. I worked with a Polish-speaking research assistant who conducted interviews with participants who preferred to speak Polish. These interviews were then translated into English by a professional translator and reviewed with the assistant to ensure accurate interpretation. Collaborating with a research assistant enabled me to include perspectives I might otherwise have missed. An additional outcome was that several participants reported feeling more comfortable sharing negative experiences with Dutch society due to the assistants' Polish background. All respondents were compensated for their time with gift vouchers. Ethical approval was obtained through the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured around four research articles, each of which can be read as a stand-alone publication. All articles are either published or are currently under review for peer-reviewed scientific journals. The chapters all address different epistemological and ontological approaches to housing trajectories. Chapters 2 and 3 present the quantitative analyses of the research and take a systematic, chronological, and material understanding of housing trajectories, by looking at places of residency across the spatial hierarchy and housing tenure registrations. Then, chapters 4 and 5 present the qualitative analysis, based on biographical interviews with Polish labour migrants in the region of North Holland. These chapters understand housing trajectories as *lived*, and focus on experienced time and housing practices, by focusing on the relations to intermediary infrastructures and the temporal experiences of housing precarity. The following section introduces each chapter individually.

Chapter 2, published in *Population, Space and Place* and co-authored by Christian Lennartz and Dorien Manting, examines the spatial trajectories of EU labour migrants. The chapter offers a quantitative perspective on arrival infrastructures and explores the extent to which labour migrants start their trajectories in new destinations, such as rural areas and smaller cities. It investigates whether migrants remain in these locations or subsequently relocate to larger urban centres, and how these patterns differ across various types of labour migrants. We conclude that the patterns of arrival and onwards movement reflect a spatial divide among labour migrants; those in more vulnerable positions start and settle in rural destinations, whereas migrants with greater resources typically have access to the arrival infrastructures of metropolitan areas.

Chapter 3, published in *Housing Studies*, focuses on housing tenure trajectories. It investigates whether common migrant housing arrangements, such as shared and informal housing, serve as transitional stages or persist as long-term arrangements. Using logistic regression analyses, this chapter identifies important differences among labour migrants, paying particular attention to employment sectors. It argues that housing challenges can be long-term issues, but that this is not the case for all labour migrants. Over time, differences emerge that are not fully explained by country of origin or employment through a recruitment agency, but instead reflect broader social divides, including income, household composition, and age.

Chapter 4, under review in a peer-reviewed journal, examines the role of migration infrastructures in the formation and experience of housing trajectories. It develops

a temporal and process-oriented perspective by asking how labour migrants' engagement with housing-migration infrastructures changes over time. Drawing on detailed biographical interviews, the chapter shows how migrants' interactions with various formal and informal actors and institutions shifts throughout their trajectories. It reveals how these engagements shape their housing outcomes, and reshape the infrastructure itself.

Chapter 5, under review in a peer-reviewed journal and co-authored with Fenne Pinkster and Dorien Manting, centres the emotional dimension of migrant housing trajectories. It investigates how housing precarity is experienced as a temporal condition, and examines how this affects migrants' negotiations, strategies, and aspirations over time. We identify four temporal logics that intertwine past, present, and prospective housing conditions. We propose understanding housing precarity not just in material and temporary terms, but also as an ontological temporal experience.

Finally, I close this dissertation with a conclusion (**Chapter 6**), synthesising the key insights from each chapter. Here, I elaborate on the three analytical lenses (temporality, relationality, plurality) underscoring this research, and bring together the quantitative and qualitative findings. I discuss differences in labour migrants housing trajectories that have come to the fore, and reflect on how these mechanisms operate in everyday life. I then return to the theoretical underpinnings of this research and reflect on how its findings extend beyond the specific migrant case, arguing for the need to undertake housing and life course studies beyond a single chronological logic.