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Navigating housing beyond arrival

The trajectories of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands

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Chapter 3.

Long-term housing challenges: The tenure trajectories of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Finding a new house is an essential but challenging undertaking for labour migrants. Current understanding of these migrant housing trajectories is rudimentary, contrasting migrants with non-migrants, or looks at the housing situation at a certain point in time. This article presents a fine-grained and longitudinal perspective on housing trajectories including less-studied alternative tenures. Using sequence and clustering techniques on Dutch register data, it identifies patterns in tenure registrations of EU labour migrants in the Netherlands, over time. In the first years, alternative private rental arrangements are common, after which some migrants move on to more secure accommodation, while others leave the Netherlands or continue to stay in precarious and/or shared-housing arrangements. A distinction is made between relatively progressive improvement (leading to social rental or homeownership) and stagnating trajectories (long-term private rent, long-term informal registration and long-term shared housing). Regression analyses show how these housing trajectories are differentiated across socio-demographic variables and the structural conditions of the arrival city, as well as by employment sector. The findings contribute to the literature on migrant housing careers and underline the wide diversity of housing challenges. Although labour migrants play a crucial role in the economy, especially lower-income, older and single migrants have limited access to permanent and secure housing.

Introduction

Finding a new house is an essential but challenging undertaking for labour migrants. After their arrival, they are faced with often overheated housing markets. With little knowledge of the local context and limited economic resources, they depend heavily on their own network or the generally expensive private rental sector for their initial accommodation (Özüekren & Van Kempen, 2002; Usman et al., 2021). Theories on migrant housing trajectories, traditionally, centre around the spatial assimilation model, with migrants moving up in the housing market and around the city as their socio-economic status improves (Massey et al., 1993; Park & Burgess, 1925/1967). These models of migration are based on the premise that housing careers follow a linear pattern. Increasingly, however, research shows that current housing patterns appear stagnating or chaotic (Bobek et al., 2020; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015). Economic reform and housing market restructuring are making homeownership, permanent tenure and other housing aspirations less and less attainable, while shared housing and being 'trapped' in the rental sector are becoming the standard for younger generations and low- and middle-income households (Arundel & Lennartz, 2017; Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Druta et al., 2021; Lennartz et al., 2016; Maalsen, 2020). These growing divides in the housing market reflect the broader societal inequalities related to employment (security), well-being and chances in life.

New perspectives on housing trajectories that deviate from the progressive model, so far, have received limited attention in the literature on migrant housing conditions. Studies using large administrative data sets and statistic modelling focus predominately on migrant homeownership (Borjas, 2002; Magnusson Turner & Hedman, 2014; Sinning, 2010; Vono-de-Vilhena & Bayona-Carrasco, 2012; Zorlu et al., 2014) or segregation patterns (Arbaci, 2007; Musterd & Deurloo, 2002; Van Gent & Musterd, 2016). This has generated valuable insights into the gaps between the migrant and non-migrant population but does not fully reflect the diversity in migrant housing trajectories. In particular, the role of alternative housing tenures such as shared and informal housing is not well understood. While qualitative studies underline the importance of these types of housing arrangements — especially for labour migrants (Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021; Finn & Mayock, 2022; McCollum & Trevena, 2021; Lombard et al., 2021) — understanding how these arrangements unfold over time is still lacking.

Using a temporal sequence analysis approach, I explored if these alternative housing forms are transitional stages, or if they continue to be of importance. Sequence analysis techniques are used in many life course studies on employment and family trajectories (Gabadinho et al., 2011; Jalovaara & Fasang, 2020; Kleinepier et al., 2015;

McVicar & Anyadike-Danes, 2002; Raab & Struffolino, 2020; Studer et al., 2018), but have only recently gained popularity in migrant housing studies (De Hoon et al., 2021; Manting et al., 2022; Torpan et al., 2022; Vogiazides & Chihaya, 2020).

For this article, I studied housing trajectories through an approach originally developed by Manting et al., (2022). I extended their approach by including informal housing arrangements. Although informal housing is not well represented in register data, I made an approximation by looking at registrations in temporary or non-residential locations. These locations include holiday parks, caravans, boats, lodgings or accommodations directly at employment locations. This study further extends the research of Manting et al., (2022) by including multiple cohorts, all EU Member States, and most importantly by focussing only on EU labour migrants (rather than all EU migrants).

Zooming in on these labour migrants, a group with similar legal access to the housing market, enables highlighting differences and inequalities within this group in more detail. This is especially urgent as labour migrants are one of the more precarious groups on the housing market. There have been alarming global reports about the housing situation of labour migrants (Amnesty International, 2020; ILO, 2021; Migrant Rights Network, 2020; Yeoh, 2020). Also in the Netherlands, the poor housing conditions of labour migrants have long been a point of concern (Baalbergen et al., 2023; Koopmans, 2012; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012; Roemer, 2020). Migrant accommodation is often shared and interconnected with employment, risking exploitation and precarity (Roemer, 2020; Szytniewski & Van der Haar, 2022; Ulceluşe et al., 2022). The media and research in the Netherlands pay attention to the housing problems particularly of migrants working in the agricultural sector or via employment agencies (Endedijk & Middel, 2020; Gerrichhauzen & Partners, 2013; Szytniewski & Van der Haar, 2022). Whether these problems are typical for this sector or also occur across other employment sectors is unknown. Therefore, my study — in addition to looking at the role of socio-demographic variables and the housing market context of the arrival city — investigates the extent to which variance in housing trajectories is associated with the sector in which migrants are employed.

The analytical lens of research on migrant groups often pivots towards country of origin. This risks overgeneralisation, and does not reflect the diverse composition of migrant groups (Vertovec, 2007; Wimmer, 2007). First, country of origin does not always translate directly to ethnic and cultural categories. Second, even if it would, there can be meaningful differences within groups, as ethnicity and culture intersect with other categorical markers, especially as migration in the European Union is increasingly characterised by 'super diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). By focusing

on differences between employment sectors and other socio-demographic factors, this paper challenges homogenising accounts of migrants by also including within-group variance along various axes.

The Netherlands is an interesting case study, as it has experienced significant labour immigration from other EU Member States, especially since the EU expansions of 2004 and 2007 (Engbersen, 2018). The immigration is closely tied to the flexibility of the labour market and the significant role of employment agencies in the Netherlands (Been & de Beer, 2022). Furthermore, the liberalisation of the Dutch housing sector has resulted in issues of affordability and accessibility (Van Gent & Hochstenbach, 2020). The outcomes of my study, thus, speak to a broader field of literature, namely that of the dualisation on the labour and housing markets and changing migrant housing careers.

Below, the paper first outlines the existing literature on housing careers and discusses how recent understanding of migrant housing conditions could benefit from new perspectives on other tenures besides that of homeownership. It subsequently discusses the methodologies employed to capture and understand differences in housing trajectories in register data sets. The empirical section presents the six typical housing trajectories, ranging from relative progressive patterns (with people ultimately ending up in homeownership or social rental situations) to stagnating trajectories of long-term informal or shared housing. Using logistic regression analyses, I examined the large differences between the housing trajectories. The results show that the lowest income groups leave the Netherlands rather quickly, middle-income groups remain in private rental, shared housing or informal housing for a longer period of time, and higher income groups ultimately progress to homeownership.

Theoretical framing

Stagnating housing trajectories

A life course approach to housing underlines that timing, duration and sequence of housing events matter. For example, the age at which people enter homeownership, or the duration of a particular stage (e.g., renting) influence their future housing career (Morrow-Jones & Wenning, 2005). Traditionally, housing careers are conceptualised as progressive and linear. Renting was typically seen as a temporary step in a housing career that ideally ended in homeownership (W. Clark et al., 2003; Kendig, 1984). Although most of the early literature on housing careers tended to focus on these broad upward patterns, it was always recognised that this was a selective approach to residential mobility. Lower economic classes or people with non-normative

lifestyles did not necessarily follow the ideal type of housing career. Furthermore, a detached owner-occupied home might not be the end goal of every person and homeownership does not always represent stability (Shlay, 2006). Housing careers can thus be extremely diverse regarding experiences, types of tenure and timing of transitions.

Since the financial crisis of 2007–2008, increased empirical attention has been paid to the diversities of these housing careers. These studies show that a housing career towards homeownership is not only selective but also unattainable for a majority of the younger population, even those of the middle-class (Bobek et al., 2020; Coulter et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2024; Lennartz et al., 2016). Alternative tenures such as shared and/or informal housing have become widespread and long-term solutions (Druta et al., 2021; Maalsen, 2020). Downward trends ('boomeranging' back to parents) and stagnating pathways ('being stuck') are thus more realistic descriptions of housing careers (Clapham, 2002; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015).

The rise of stagnating housing careers is embedded in broader processes of late capitalism. Individualisation, diversified and postponed life-course transitions are often identified as important drivers of changing housing careers (Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Coulter et al., 2020). Furthermore, these are closely linked to the increased flexibility and mobility on the labour market (Arundel & Lennartz, 2020; Druta et al., 2021). Crumbling employment security constrains housing opportunities, as access to a mortgage in the post global financial crisis era is increasingly restricted to prime households with well-paid and secure employment contracts (Loomans & Kaika, 2021).

Also, the commodification and financialisation of housing leads to the increased prevalence of long-term private renting and alternative tenures. Diminishing housing affordability drives people into sharing or informal options outside the regulated market (Lombard, 2019). In addition, non-ownership tenures form popular investment opportunities for the real estate industry (Druta & Ronald, 2021; Maalsen, 2020). It can be assumed that this is relevant to different groups of labour migrants, with short-term tenancies, 'all-inclusive' housing arrangements and proximity to work being used to attract high-income creative professionals (Bergan et al., 2021; Grundström, 2021; Uyttebrouck et al., 2020) as well as the low-income working class migrants (Ulceluşe et al., 2022; Lombard, 2019).

Although shared and informal housing have been highly problematised in relation to labour migrants, conditions do vary significantly. Communal living can facilitate the provision of support and foster feelings of belonging (V. Clark et al., 2018; Nasreen & Ruming, 2021), but it may also result in stress, anxiety and not feeling at home

(Wilkinson & Ortega-Alcázar, 2019b). In general, alternative tenures come with fewer housing rights and stability. Informal housing, in particular, comes with the ever-present risk of eviction (Lombard et al., 2021). While some people appreciate flexibility, not knowing how long or with whom one lives can endanger someone's ontological security (Huisman & Mulder, 2022). These alternative rental tenures, thus, fit into a wider trend of increased inequality and precarity within the housing and labour markets (Arundel & Lennartz, 2017).

Migrant housing pathways

Despite the fact that labour migrants are key subjects of intensified flexibility and labour mobility, they are rarely the subject of case studies on stagnating housing careers. Especially quantitative studies on migrant housing have so far paid little attention to new perspectives on the diversity of tenures and housing pathways. These studies tend to focus predominantly on pathways towards homeownership. The reason for this might be that homeownership is often seen and taken as a proxy for successful integration and settlement of migrants (Borjas, 2002; Constant et al., 2009; Kauppinen & Vilkkama, 2016; Sinning, 2010; Torpan et al., 2022; Vono-de-Vilhena & Bayona-Carrasco, 2012), but also because non-conventional housing conditions are more difficult to capture in quantitative data, as these rely predominately on registered housing. Yet, qualitative studies show that migrants experience similar stagnating pathways (Finn & Mayock, 2022; Lombard et al., 2021; Murdie, 2003; D. Robinson et al., 2007). Informal networks, the lack of affordable secure options and labour precarity push migrants even more towards the illegal and/or shared housing sector. For undocumented migrants, informal housing is in fact the only option, but documented migrants also rely on this unregulated part of the housing sector (Dotsey & Chiodelli, 2021).

Furthermore, studies on migrants often treat migrants as a more or less homogenous group, for example comparing migrants of different countries (Manting et al., 2022; Maslova & King, 2020; Murdie, 2003) or comparing a particular migrant group with the non-migrant population (Zorlu et al., 2014). These approaches generate valuable insights into how the role of culture or ethnic social network contributes to shaping specific housing needs and preferences (Bolt & Van Kempen, 2002; Dahya, 1974; Özüekren & Van Kempen, 2002), but they also risk overgeneralisation, and do not fully reflect the diverse composition and experiences of migrant groups (Finn & Mayock, 2022; Vertovec, 2007; Wimmer, 2007).

This paper aims to provide a more fine-grained understanding of the differences within the group of EU labour migrants, beyond their country of origin, by placing it in the employment context. Studies have shown that a disadvantaged position on

the labour market is often associated with a disadvantaged position on the housing market (Arundel & Lennartz, 2020). This is due to earlier mentioned access to mortgage credit, but — specifically for migrants — also to the intermediaries and recruitment agencies that arrange accommodation in addition to employment (Lindquist et al., 2012; McCollum & Findlay, 2018). Most studies on the labour market and housing conditions of migrants focus on employment agencies. Many employment agencies offer accommodation in combination with work, often shared and/or at the workplace. Very little is currently known about this situation for migrants working directly in other employment sectors, although ‘highly skilled’ migrants also make use of commercial intermediaries that offer housing services and information (Findlay & Li, 1998; Van den Broek, et al., 2016). Strockmeijer (2020) analyses the employment positions of labour migrants in the Netherlands and finds that, in addition to those working via an employment agency, workers in agriculture, transportation and the services sector (e.g., cleaning) have a greater chance of labour market precarity. In contrast, those working in finance and public services have better labour market positions. How this relates to housing conditions was, as yet, unknown. By including employment context, I have also attempted to analyse the potential long-term influence of the employment sector and intermediaries on housing outcomes.

Empirical design, data and methods

I used complete population register data sets from the Dutch System of Social Statistical Datasets (SSD). The SSD includes administrative data sources from municipalities, Dutch Tax and Customs Administration and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service. Combining the records enabled me to extract information on all registered people and their accommodation in the Netherlands. This also includes migrants, except for those intending to stay less than four months as they are not required to register. To select only recently arrived labour migrants, I limited the population to EU migrants over 18 years old who came to the Netherlands between 2011¹⁶ and 2014 for the first time¹⁷. I define ‘labour migrants’ in a broad way, across various employment sectors, including both high- and low-wage jobs. I included all migrants who Statistic Netherlands categorises as labour migrants¹⁸, as well as migrants officially categorised as ‘family’ or ‘other’, but who were either employed or

16 As far as this is registered. Migrants who arrive multiple times within this time frame (due to remigration patterns) were counted as new cases due to data limitations.

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18 Full definition labour migrant statistics Netherlands: - “The register-derived migration purpose ‘Labour’ applies when, within 120 days upon entry, the bulk of the migrant’s income is from labour. Persons immigrating into the Netherlands without being accompanied (by a partner, father or mother) who were employed in the year before date of entry are classified as labour migrants. Couples arriving in the Netherlands without being accompanied by a parent are classified as one family migrant and one labour migrant. The first person to take up employment is classified as a labour migrant, the other person as a family migrant.” (CBS, n.d.).

self-employed within the first two years after migration. In other words, I included all migrants who were in paid employment at a certain point in the first years after their arrival in the Netherlands. Migrant students, non-EU migrants and asylum seekers were excluded¹⁹, as they are subject to other regulations regarding access to the housing market.

The tenure status of the remaining cohort of 123,686 migrants was then captured on an annual basis (this does not necessarily include all moves) for a total of six years. This means that the cohort from 2011 was followed until 2017 and the cohort from 2014 until 2020. Although it is recognised that tenure is a limited dimension of a persons' housing situation, other dimensions such as costs and contracts, are unfortunately not registered. I then distinguished between homeownership, non-shared social rental, non-shared private rental, shared residency with non-family members, informal housing and emigration. Shared housing includes all individuals who share their accommodations with multiple administrative households (based on the household administration of Statistics Netherlands). Informal housing refers to all registrations at non-residential locations, such as industrial complexes and recreational homes. When multiple households were registered at a non-residential location, this was still categorised as informal housing. Homeownership, social rental and private rental status were based on registration in the Dutch Municipal Personal Records Database (GBA). This refers to the legal status of owners rather than tenants, meaning that social rental refers to units owned by a housing corporation. The majority of the housing stock owned by corporations is also rented out within the regulated rental sector, but this is not always the case. Although there can be some discrepancy, the GBA registry is taken as a proxy for the tenure arrangement. Emigration includes migrants who are currently no longer in the GBA database as they have likely returned to their country of origin or have migrated to another country. Although emigration is not a tenure status, it is still included in the data set as a large share of labour migrants (45% of the population in this research) leave the Netherlands after some time, permanently or temporarily. This group has a specific demographic profile, often consisting of lower-income migrants. As this paper is interested in the divide between migrants with respect to housing experiences, these emigration trajectories are relevant, especially as early emigration could be tied to the housing status in early years and the lack of better housing opportunities (Ulcelușe et al., 2022). In order to also identify these people, emigration was added as separate status in the sequence analysis.

A disadvantage of the data set is that it only includes the administrated tenure arrangements. In reality, people can be registered at a certain address without still

19 For the cohorts 2011-2014 this is a group of approximately 370.924 migrants (46.253 EU students, 124.281 EU non-working migrants and 200.390 non-EU migrants).

living there, having left the country or having moved to elsewhere, without being registered at their new address. Irregular migrants will also not appear in the data set. Another group that is not included are labour migrants who stay longer than four months but fail to register. This appears to happen rather often, as migrants are unaware of the registration requirement and related benefits. Estimates vary widely, but a recent study found that over half of all labour migrants fail to register, despite staying in the country for more than four months (Pointer, 2021). The findings of this study should therefore be carefully interpreted. They do not capture the full phenomenon of alternative tenure arrangements as shared and informal housing are most likely often not officially registered. The advantage is however that this offers an unique opportunity to study the full population of (registered) EU migrants, longitudinally. This makes the data relatively representative and not biased by for example sampling or selective attrition over time.

I then used sequence analysis and cluster techniques to capture tenure stages, longitudinally. Sequence analysis enables researchers to investigate events in the context of what precedes and follows (Abbott, 1995; Raab & Struffolino, 2022). For this study, this enabled looking at how certain tenure states are placed in a housing trajectory over time, also including their order. All individual tenure sequences were then grouped into clusters using optimal matching techniques that group observations into relatively homogenous clusters, based on how much it 'costs' to change one sequence into another. There are different methods of assigning costs; for this study I used the transition rates in the data. This means that rarely occurring transitions between stages were categorised as 'less similar' (i.e., 'costing' more) than more frequently occurring ones (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2010; Studer & Ritschard, 2016). This method was chosen as it acknowledges that not all transitions are equal to each other. For example, informal housing is more similar to shared housing than to homeownership. I subsequently tried out a variety of clustering solutions based on combinations of Portioning Around Medoids (PAM) and Ward clustering (see Raab & Struffolino, 2022, for a discussion of differences). Different solutions, varying between 4 and 10 clusters, have been applied. Finally, I chose a typology of 6 different trajectories created by the Ward clustering. This was the cluster division that included the theoretically most interesting patterns (including the informal housing cluster) and was statistically substantiated by sufficient cluster quality indicators²⁰. This division into clusters groups the trajectories together that have a similar tenure status

20 Hubert's gamma of 0.9, point biserial correlation 0.73 and Average Silhouette Width of 0.41. Average Silhouette Width (ASW) measures the quality of the cluster division by measuring how similar a sequence is to sequences in its own cluster compared to sequences in another cluster. A high ASW indicates a high within cluster homogeneity, a low or negative ASW refers to random cluster divisions (Studer, 2013). The cluster division of this study (0.41) indicates that the division is valid, but still includes a high variety within clusters. This is common for complex sequence data (Raab & Struffolino, 2022).

for the majority of years, although they often have different starting points. This means that, for example, people on a trajectory that ends in shared housing but started as informal housing or social rent are grouped together in the same cluster. This masks some of the actual temporal diversity in the data, but enhances the interpretation of the regression models and thus reveals the broader differences. The sequence and cluster analyses were performed using the TraMineR and WeightedCluster packages (Gabadinho et al., 2011; Studer, 2013) in R statistical software.

Sequence analysis has little explanatory power as it mainly describes dominant patterns in data. Multinomial logistic regression techniques were therefore used to predict differences in housing trajectories (i.e., the clusters). As not much is known yet about the differences *between* labour migrants, I took an explorative approach and included a broad range of variables. In line with the literature on housing careers and residential mobility, I added variables that influence housing needs, resources and restrictions (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). This included socio-demographic variables (age, income, country of birth²¹, having a child and having a Dutch partner) and contextual variables (level of urbanity and average real estate value in the place of arrival) to approach the opportunities and constraints of the housing market. Furthermore, I included each migrant's first employment sector as a proxy for the role of the employer and/or affiliated housing intermediaries. All these variables were only measured at year 1 to avoid endogeneity issues. Because the outcomes of multinomial logistic regression are not easy to interpret, they are presented in predicted probabilities, averaged over the weighted levels of the other variables, using the ggeffects package in R (Lüdtke, 2018).

Results: longitudinal patterns of housing

Start: entering the housing sector

According to a progressive perspective on housing trajectories, people's start on the housing market is characterised by renting, after which, if their economic status improves, they are expected to transition into homeownership. The data shows that indeed over 90% of labour migrants start in the rental sector, but this general information on tenure masks a great deal of variety. Alternative rental arrangements are very common. One third of labour migrants starts in the single-household private rental sector, almost half start in shared housing (44%), and 1 in 10 starts in informal

21 As registered by the Personal Records Database Netherlands (BRP). This refers to country of birth and some countries no longer exist (Soviet Union (including Estland, Letland and Litouwen) and Czechoslovakia). This category other includes the countries with less than 1,000 cases, (Malta, Romania, Luxembourg, Cyprus, Austria, Former Yugoslavia, Denmark and Finland). As this paper contests homogenizing categorizations, I avoided combining countries in categories such as 'Southern Europe' and included migrants of all EU countries, rather than selecting a few. This is however a compromise as it makes the regression models more complex.

housing (10%) (Table 3.1). This last percentage is considerable, taking into account that it likely presents only a limited share of people in informal living arrangements, as these types of accommodation are often not registered at all. A small percentage enters directly into a more secure form of tenure; 7.7 in homeownership, and 7.6 in social rental accommodation. In general, the social rental sector in the Netherlands is characterised by strong rent protection (Huisman, 2016). Access to this type of housing is restricted only to lower incomes and functions according to waiting lists. These lists vary regionally and over time, but during the observation period ranged from around 1 year to 8 years (Kromhout et al., 2016). Early access to the social rental sector is not easy, which likely explains the low percentage.

Table 3.1 Distribution housing tenure states year 1 and year 6

Tenure	Year 1	Year 6
Homeownership	9,490 (7.7%)	22,588 (18%)
Social rental	9,411 (7.6%)	12,434 (10%)
Private rental	37,368 (30%)	16,489 (13%)
Informal	12,980 (10%)	2,031 (1.6%)
Shared	54,437 (44%)	14,547 (12%)
Remigrated	NA	55,597 (45%)

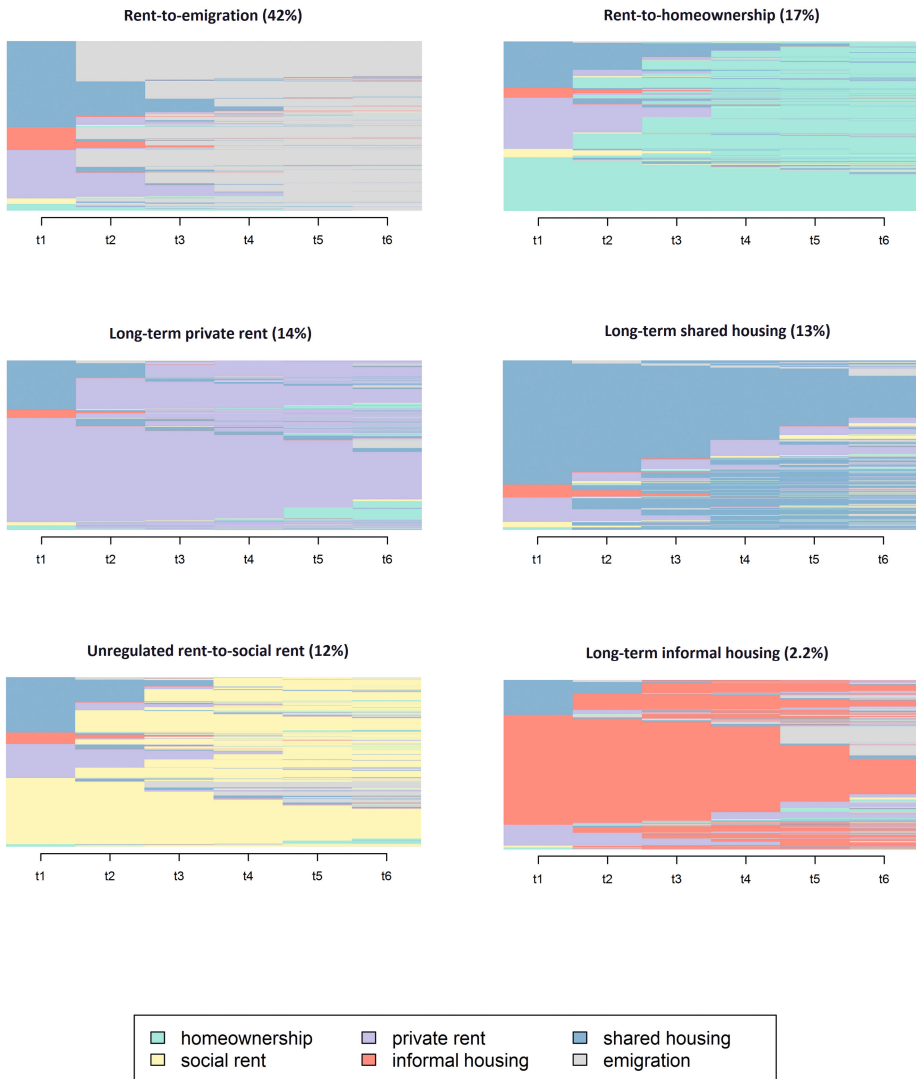
Data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets, Statistics Netherlands (own calculations)

For the last year of the housing trajectories (T6), the picture changed substantially. Almost half (45%) of the labour migrants had left the Netherlands. The share of shared rental housing, single-household rentals and informal housing decreased substantially (see Table 3.2), while the shares of social rental and homeownership increased. In order to understand what happens in the interim, including the timing and order of different tenures, I employed a sequence and cluster analysis.

Sequence analysis: housing trajectories

The sequencing and clustering of the tenure stages reveal large differences in how the housing trajectories unfold after the first year. In total, six dominant clusters can be distinguished (see Figure 3.1). These can be seen as a typology of housing trajectories of labour migrants in the Netherlands.

Figure 3.1 Frequency plot of tenure stages per housing trajectory cluster



Data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets, Statistics Netherlands (own calculations)

The largest cluster (42%), 'rent-to-emigration', includes the trajectories that mostly start with renting in the unregulated sector and end in emigration. Labour migrants in this cluster will leave the Netherlands within their first four years (indicated in grey, in Figure 3.1). Their trajectories frequently start in informal housing (13%, red), shared (51%, blue) or single-household private rental (29%, purple). This cluster represents the typical picture of a temporary labour migrant that comes to the

Netherlands looking for work, lives in rental accommodation and eventually returns to his or her country of origin or moves on to another country.

The second largest cluster contains the 'rent-to-homeownership' trajectories. This represents 17% of labour migrants. While 32% immediately start with homeownership, the majority of this group starts their housing trajectory from a different type of tenure (68%) — often privately rented or shared housing, and rarely informal housing or social rental accommodation. Around year 4, most will have entered homeownership.

The third cluster is that of 'long-term private rent' trajectories (14%) and contains migrants who have stayed in private rental accommodation for most of the observed period. Some (29%) started their housing trajectories in shared accommodation, but most migrants (62%) did not share their home and directly entered the private rental sector. This cluster also contains a group of people who spend most of their housing trajectory in privately rented accommodation which ended either in homeownership (17%), shared housing (8%) or emigration (9%).

The fourth cluster 'long-term shared housing' contains the shared housing trajectories (13%). This cluster mirrors the private rental trajectories; some migrants start their housing trajectory by not sharing their accommodations (13%), but most start in shared housing (73%) and remain in this type of accommodation throughout the six years of the observed period. There is also a small group of migrants who left shared housing accommodation in year 2 or 3, but re-entered it after some years of staying mostly in private rental housing. The clusters of long-term private rental accommodation and long-term shared housing include trajectories in the private housing sector with, in general, higher rents and less rent protection compared to the social housing sector.

The fifth cluster 'unregulated-to-social rent' (12%) contains mostly migrants who have entered the social housing sector after a couple of years of renting in the unregulated sector (either shared (33%), informal (6.9%), or non-shared private rental accommodation (29%)). This last cluster contains also a rather large group (39%) of people who started directly in social housing. This includes people with a non-migrant partner who already had access to social housing, or those who migrated to districts with shorter waiting lists.

The smallest cluster is the 'long-term informal housing' trajectory, with 2.2%. This cluster includes the trajectories characterised by registration in non-residential locations. I expect this to represent arrangements without any rental agreement

or rent protection. This cluster is quite diverse. Some migrants enter informal accommodation after the first few years in shared housing or non-shared private rental accommodation, some stay in informal accommodation for the entire observation period of six years, but there is also a group of people who leaves the Netherlands around year 5 or 6, as can be seen in Figure 3.1.

The sequence and cluster analyses show that not all trajectories mimic the traditional progressive housing career (Kendig, 1984). While homeownership and social rental trajectories can be considered progressive (after some years in unprotected rental accommodations, these migrants move to a more secure tenure in terms of tenant protection), other trajectories can be seen to be stagnating: with little substantive change in terms of tenure, over time. Migrants who follow the long-term shared housing, long-term private rental accommodation and long-term informal housing trajectories, sometimes move between these different types of unregulated tenures or leave the Netherlands altogether, but they rarely enter the more secure homeownership or social rent sector. The sequence analysis also shows the timing of tenure transitions; most trajectories are stable around the fourth year after migration, meaning that the majority of migrants do not change their type of tenure anymore. While some have then moved to more secure types of tenure, others have left the country or continue to stay in arrangements that can be more precarious.

Differences in housing trajectories

This section discusses the differences in housing trajectories in more detail and estimates what types of labour migrants follow what types of trajectories, in an effort to determine what explains the variation.

Figure 3.2 summarises the effect of individual characteristics on the probability²² of a migrant following a particular housing trajectory. It shows that individual characteristics matter greatly; age, gender, country of birth, partnership status, parenthood and income in the first year all shape the differences in housing trajectories. What stands out is that resources matter, not just financial but also human resources. Labour migrants with a higher income or a Dutch partner in the first year of their trajectory have the highest probability of following a rent-to-homeownership trajectory. Migrants with the lowest income are more likely to follow a rent-to-emigration trajectory. The different rental tenure trajectories are also variegated by income; while the lowest and the highest income groups rarely enter the social housing sector, this is more likely for migrants belonging to the middle-income groups. Long-term shared housing and long-term informal housing trajectories are also slightly overrepresented amongst these middle-

²² See Appendix A3.3 for table with confidence intervals of the predicted probabilities.

income groups. This underlines the divide between lower-income and higher-income migrants on the housing market. The traditional progressive housing career that results in homeownership is only attainable by a small group of high-income labour migrants. Migrants working in jobs with lower salaries continue to stay in alternative (unprotected) rental accommodation or leave the Netherlands rather quickly, allegedly because of a lack of better housing opportunities. Interestingly, migrants over the age of 38 have a higher probability (15.7%) of following a long-term shared housing trajectory than those aged 25 to 38 (11.9%) and 18 to 25 (13%). Older migrants are also overrepresented in the long-term informal housing cluster (29.2%, in contrast to 21% for 18 to 25-year-olds).

Figure 3.2 Adjusted probabilities for individual characteristics



Data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets, Statistics Netherlands (own calculations)

As other studies extensively analyse the role of country of origin (Bolt & Van Kempen, 2002; Manting et al., 2022; Maslova & King, 2020; Zorlu et al., 2014), I chose to focus more on the first employment sector of labour migrants, a variable that has so far received little attention in the literature. Figure 3.3 illustrates, per employment sector, the probability of migrants following a certain housing trajectory. I found that long-term informal housing and long-term shared housing are more common amongst migrants working in agriculture, construction, hospitality and the private services²³ sector, although not all findings are statistically significant for the informal

23 Broad category that includes cleaning companies, call centres and various lease companies.

housing trajectories (see appendices for full model). Contrary to expectations, labour migrants who were employed through an employment agency were found to have the highest probability of following a unregulated rent-to-social rent trajectory (12.3%) compared to those who found work in some other way, even after controlling for the share of social housing in the arrival city²⁴. This probability is significantly higher than for labour migrants directly employed in manufacturing and industry (8.2%) and financial and business services (6.6%), but it does not deviate much from the average share of labour migrants who follow an unregulated rent-to-social rent trajectory (12%). The chances of them following a rent-to-homeownership trajectory are the lowest for construction workers (9.6%) and the highest for migrants whose employment sector was unknown in the first year of migration (17.1%). Return to the country of origin or moving on to another country, after a short stay in the Netherlands, (the rent-to-emigration cluster) is most likely amongst labour migrants in financial and business services (51.8%) and least likely amongst those working in the construction sector (40.2%). These probabilities are all controlled for all other variables and indicate that there is a connection between housing conditions and employment in other sectors, as well (e.g. agriculture, construction, hospitality and other services).

Figure 3.3 Adjusted probabilities for employment sector



Data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets, Statistics Netherlands (own calculations)

24 As controlling for share of social rent did not yield theoretically interesting results, I did not include it in the final model. Results available upon request.

Beyond these individual differences, contextual factors also play a role in differentiating between the trajectories. These are depicted in Figure 3.4. Migrants arriving in less urbanised areas have a slightly higher probability (3.5%) of following a long-term informal housing trajectory than those starting in urban areas (2%). Lower levels of urbanisation furthermore increase the probability of migrants following a trajectory towards permanent social rental or homeownership accommodation, while more urbanised areas are associated with long-term shared housing (13.8% in the most urbanised areas, compared to 10.9% in the least urbanised areas). This could be related to the highly urbanised areas having long waiting lists for social housing and limited numbers of affordable/available owner-occupier houses (Hochstenbach & Arundel, 2020; Kromhout & Wittkämper, 2019). Average house prices are also a factor; migrants who start in areas with the highest real estate values are less likely to follow a rent-to-homeownership trajectory (11.3%) or unregulated rent-to-social rent trajectory (6.2%) than those who start in areas with the lowest average real estate values (17.6% and 13.5% respectively). The context of the arrival city thus affects the type of housing trajectory migrants will follow. This is connected to the opportunities and restrictions related to real estate values, but also substantiates the idea that accommodation arrangements via the workplace or in recreational parks is more common in rural areas. Cohort effects seem to be limited, although migrants who arrive later have a slightly higher probability to follow a stagnating housing trajectory.

Figure 3.4 Adjusted probabilities for contextual variables



Data source: System of Social Statistical Datasets, Statistics Netherlands (own calculations)

Discussion and conclusion

By building on register data, I focused on the administrative tenure arrangements of labour migrants. This unveiled a unique and detailed picture of the highly varied housing conditions of EU labour migrants, over time, a group that has so far received limited attention in register data studies. By focusing only on labour migrants, rather than all EU migrants, I was able to show more in-depth differences amongst this group. Particular focus was on the role of the employment sector. By doing so, my findings address the important goal to understanding migrant groups beyond their country of origin (Özüekren & Van Kempen, 2002; Vertovec, 2007; Wimmer, 2007) and extends the study by Manting et al., (2022). The findings add to a growing body of work on stagnating housing trajectories that have predominantly focused on the challenges faced by young people (Arundel & Lennartz, 2017; Arundel & Ronald, 2016; Bobek et al., 2020; Coulter et al., 2020; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015; Howard et al., 2024; Lennartz et al., 2016), showing that these are also common amongst labour migrants. The outcomes furthermore contribute to the understanding of migrant housing by approaching informality, sharing and non-ownership tenures in a fine-grained, quantitative way. Through sequence techniques I showed how these tenures, for some, are a temporary step on the housing market and in line with the progressive view on housing careers (Clark et al., 2003; Kendig, 1984), while, for most, their accommodations are a more permanent state. Increased disparities on the housing market are thus also reflected in labour migrant housing conditions.

The analysis shows that these trajectories are highly differentiated by socio-demographic characteristics. The lowest-income groups tend to return to their country of origin or to go elsewhere, rather quickly. Based on my current research, I was unable to explain why, but other studies suggest that disappointing experiences on the housing and labour markets could very well be part of the reason (Ulceluş et al., 2022). Middle-income and older migrants, I found, tend to stay in the country for longer periods of time and are over-represented in stagnating trajectories characterised by a continuation of shared housing, informal rental accommodation or regular private rental housing. These types of tenure, generally, enjoy less rent protection in the Netherlands and although their housing market circumstances may vary significantly, they do hint at a more precarious environment that is prone to the risk of unwanted changes in house prices, roommates or contract terms. As the literature on shared housing focuses predominantly on young adults (Coulter et al., 2020), it is especially surprising that older migrants have a greater chance of long-term sharing and/or informal accommodation. It could be that this group includes labour migrants who move in with their children or other family members who had already arrived in the Netherlands before them. Testing this hypothesis

was outside the scope of my research, due to data limitations. The answer could also be related to people's reduced access to mortgage financing because of their older age, them having different housing aspirations because of commitments in their country of origin, or to lower chances on the labour market. It certainly suggests that, specifically for labour migrants, it would also be important to look at the shared housing and informal accommodation amongst older generations.

In addition, the level of urbanisation of the place of arrival makes a difference for stagnating trajectories; informal housing is associated with more rural areas, while shared housing is associated with highly urbanised areas. This is not surprising, as informal accommodation, in this study, refers to people registered at non-residential locations. These are often industrial, agricultural, or recreational facilities that are not likely to be situated in highly urbanised areas. Informal housing in urban areas may also mean that people are not registered at all and therefore do not appear in the data set.

Furthermore, I explored the role of the employment sector in migrant housing conditions upon their arrival in the Netherlands. Surprisingly, I found that migrants who were working via an employment agency in the first year of their occupational career, are more likely to enter the social housing sector and less likely to follow a long-term shared or informal housing trajectory than those working in many other employment sectors. Employment agencies are known for offering 'package deals' that provide migrants with housing, transport and health insurance in addition to employment (Sporton, 2013; Szytniewski & Van der Haar, 2022; Ulceluşe et al., 2022). In the past, various reports have shown the atrocious housing conditions that are sometimes offered in these package deals in the Netherlands (Koopmans, 2012; Roemer, 2020). Therefore, I had expected to find that labour migrants who entered the country via such employment agencies would be overrepresented in the stagnating trajectories. As mentioned, social housing has long waiting lists and would therefore be expected to be less accessible than other segments of the housing market. It could be that labour migrants working for employment agencies specifically found their way to areas with more available social housing after their second year. As there is no data on the waiting lists for social housing and I could not include time-varying variables in the sequence analysis due to endogeneity issues, I could not include this in my findings.

Because my study included various employment sectors, I was able to show that housing challenges are found across the entire labour market. Long-term shared housing, informal and private-sector renting were found to be more common amongst migrants working in 'other private services sectors' (e.g., cleaning companies

and call centres), agriculture and construction. In contrast, those working in finance and business were found to rarely share housing or stay in informal accommodation for a prolonged period. This could be related to the role of the employer or that of intermediaries. Informal housing, for example, could be associated with the practice of workplace registration in the agricultural sector (Gerrichhauzen & Partners, 2013). However, it could also be a reflection of the general socio-economic status or life style related to these labour market positions (with finance and business, in general, valued as higher skilled and better paid). These findings suggest that is important to look beyond employment agencies and also include other sectors when studying the relationship between employment and housing. More research can be done to investigate whether the role of employers, intermediaries, and people's own social network play a greater part in their housing situation, or whether other factors related to the employment sector, such as life style or education, are key.

Ultimately, the findings of this study underline how housing inequalities are a widespread phenomenon in late capitalism. While labour migrants have a crucial function in today's economy, their housing trajectories are fragmented and, in particular, lower-income, older and single migrants have limited access stable and secure housing. These challenges are not transitional and do not disappear over time. However, there is also a group of highly skilled labour migrants on a higher income who are able to achieve rapid access to homeownership and who will hardly make use of alternative forms of tenure. These differences are not only along the lines of countries of origin, but reflect broader societal divides. The impact of these divides extends beyond the housing domain, as precarity on the housing market can overlap and influence other aspects of daily life. The policy ramifications of these findings are manifold. At the moment, Dutch policymakers are concerned with addressing the detrimental housing conditions of labour migrants (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2022). They are specifically targeting employment agencies as key actors in the provision of sub-standard housing. It appears however that housing insecurity is a much broader phenomenon and is related to wider inequalities in society. In order to address housing issues, a comprehensive vision and approach is thus needed that not only targets employers, but also addresses housing accessibility and migrant labour market conditions in general.