



A Magnifying Lens on Unraveling the Necessities of Housing Migrants in Malaysia through a Qualitative Revelation

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Abstract. In Malaysia, migrant workers frequently reside in designated housing that goes by the names of "hostels," "workers' quarters," or "migrant worker housing". These facilities, which are frequently offered by companies or labour agents, are designed to house many workers in communal living areas. Further, there are more significant difficulties pertaining to the housing of foreign workers. These settlements are often referred to as "illegal immigrant settlements" or "squatter areas" and present various challenges for both the migrants and the authorities. The objectives of this study are (1) to examine the housing needs of migrant workers in Malaysia and (2) to investigate potential mitigation measures for workers' housing issues. This research employs a qualitative methodology that includes content analysis through a comprehensive examination of secondary data. Being in accordance with the SDG objectives makes this study crucial to investigate. The right to an appropriate standard of life, which includes adequate housing, is supported by several important guiding principles, most notably SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Surprisingly, the housing aspect of the integration of common migrants has received little attention in comparison to other integration programmes. The findings of this study revealed that the conditions in migrant housing, the presence of illegal housing and the discomfort of local residents all contribute to the housing necessities of migrant workers in Malaysia. Potential solutions to the problem of workers' housing include Malaysia's current regulations as well as adaptations of solutions from other nations.

Keywords: Migrants House, Adequate Housing, Foreign Workers, Human Right.

1 Introduction

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) both recognised the right to appropriate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living. The rights to adequate food, water, sanitation, clothes, housing, and medical treatment, as

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well as social protection addressing circumstances beyond one's control, are all covered under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nation, 2018). Based on the renowned idea of the four freedoms held by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Article 25 seeks to provide freedom from want. In a 1941 lecture, he anticipated a world based on four fundamental human freedoms: liberty of expression and speech, the right to worship God whatever one chooses freedom from want, and freedom from

fear. A 2017 declaration endorsed "an ideal of a vibrant, varied, fair, and safe community rooted in the pillars of fundamental human rights." The rights to a reasonable standard of living, housing, health and social services, education, and nondiscrimination and equality of opportunity were chosen as the top five human rights priorities (United Nation, 2018).

The goal of free people living in a world without fear or want, as stated in the ICESCR, can only be realised if circumstances are established that allow each person to exercise his or her civil and political rights as well as their economic, social, and cultural rights. The right to adequate housing is further defined in Article 11(1) of the ICESCR, which states that "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions" (United Nation, 1966). In 1976, the UK decided to abide with ICESCR. It guarantees the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, such as the right to education, fair and reasonable working conditions, a livable wage, the best possible health, and social security (Equity and Human Rights Commission, na).

The dignity and well-being of individuals and communities depend on having access to adequate housing. A stable social environment, greater health, better education, and overall socioeconomic growth can all be attributed to adequate housing. Adequate housing is of paramount importance to migrant workers for several reasons. Migrant workers are individuals who move from their home countries or regions to work in another country or area, often to fill labor shortages or work in specific industries. These workers often face unique challenges and vulnerabilities, making access to suitable housing a crucial aspect of their well-being and human rights. The housing needs of migrant workers in Malaysia can vary depending on various factors, such as their employment sector, income level, legal status, and family composition. However, there are some common housing needs that many migrant workers share.

Affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, cultural adequacy, security of tenure, affordability, habitability, availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure are only a few examples of qualities that can be associated with adequate housing. The ability of the housing sector to provide appropriate housing for everyone has been severely compromised by worldwide issues such as urbanisation, migration, climate change, and the 2008 global financial crisis.

1.1 Overview of Migrants Workers Housing in Malaysia

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region's top destinations for migrant labour include Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. These nations have been drawing migrant labourers from the ASEAN region's neighbouring nations and be-

yond for a variety of considerations, including employment opportunities, labour shortages, and other factors. There are around 5.1 million employed migrants in the region, according to official information submitted to the International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) Database in ASEAN. Malaysia and Thailand were two of the top 20 nations with the greatest populations of foreign migrants in the world in 2019 (International Labour Organisation, 2022). While acknowledging the need to solve labour shortages, particularly in important economic areas, all three countries are dependent on and resistive to low wage foreign labour. However, each state has also announced steps to lessen this reliance on migrant labour. For the vast majority of migrant workers, this entails relocating to nations with higher cost of living: Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore are all categorised as upper-middle income nations. Low-wage migrant workers have few options for housing in the three destination countries because of the financial hardship they face, which in some cases is compounded by the legal obligations of their relocation. Due to housing's significance as a commodity for the creation of wealth in all three countries, notably in their major cities, there is a growing dissociation from its original social purpose (UN Human Rights Council, 2017).

Malaysia's development initiatives include housing provision as a key component. The Malaysian government understands the significance of providing decent, affordable housing for all of its residents, including both native Malaysians and migrant workers. Several policies and programs have been implemented to address housing needs and improve access to decent housing for various segments of the population. In Malaysia, both the government and the private sector provide housing. The private housing market in Malaysia has come under criticism for offering housing that is prohibitively costly for people with the median annual household income as well as for having an unregulated housing rental market with unstable tenancy and a high risk of eviction. The imbalance between supply and demand and Malaysia's slower income growth are the main causes of the home affordability crisis. For qualified borrowers, financing remained available for the purchase of homes, with more than 70% of housing loans going to first-time purchasers and nearly two-thirds of new housing loans going towards the purchase of homes priced under RM500,000 (USD 110,000) (Malaysia National Bank, 2017). On the supply side, structural and cyclical elements of Malaysia's housing market have prevented the market from producing a suitable amount of accessible homes for the general public. Household income growth has not kept pace with the increase in housing costs on the demand side. These factors, together with the fact that the majority of Malaysian households lack financial literacy and prefer home ownership to renting, have all led to the high demand for home purchases. While, the social housing that the government provides has come under fire for its subpar architecture and has been dubbed the "new urban slums" by some (Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, 2018). Housing concerns involving migrant worker are widespread throughout the world, including Malaysia.

These problems are a result of particular challenges and perils that migrant workers frequently experience when attempting to find homes in their host nations. The housing problem for migrant workers becomes obvious during Movement Control Order (MCO) by April 2020. Reports of migrants experiencing loneliness, tension, and a

shortage of access to running water amid the lockdown were made (Sciortino, 2020). A construction site in the city witnessed a cluster of infections among migrant workers not long after some restrictions were relaxed (ILO 2020a; UN 2020). According to reports, the Director-General of Health described the congested migrant worker housing he inspected as a breeding ground for infectious illnesses (Pandiyan 2020). In addition, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) alleged that migrant workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar were made to reside in crowded, filthy conditions in Selangor, Malaysia (Wahab, 2020). Equally, migrant worker bemoaned their accommodations, such as the absence of physical separation (Khadka 2020), as they occupy a cramped home. Furthermore, according to the MTUC, migrant workers frequently experienced typical labour rights breaches, such as wrongful termination of employment, unpaid wages, and subpar living circumstances (ILO, 2020).

2 Methodology

The study aims (1) to examine the housing needs of migrant workers in Malaysia and (2) to investigate potential mitigation measures for workers' housing issues. Accordingly, the study is designed to explore migrant workers' housing-related concerns. Therefore, content analysis is used to analysed the data. By organising and eliciting meaning from the data gathered, content analysis attempts to reach practical conclusions. The secondary data has been used exclusively in this study since it explores concerns related to migrant workers' housing. The vast majority of the data consists of reports which assist comprehend the issues in depth. The journals have also been cited to corroborate the claim.

2.1 Planning

- Set a research objective
- Set a method of data collection
- Set a method of analysis

2.2 Data Collection

- Identify source of data – appropriate report, journal, recording and other materials
- Set the year of data released for reconciliation
- Convert the information into a text

2.3 Organising

- Organising all the collected data
- Reading through all collected data
- Coding the data

2.4 Data Analysing

- Data analyse based on themes and description

2.5 Finding

- Interpreting the result

Figure: Content Analysis Proses

3 Findings

3.1 To Examine the Housing Needs of Migrant Workers in Malaysia

One of the most onerous consequences of the global financial crisis is the lack of affordable housing, which is generally acknowledged. Worker with average earnings search for cheaper, frequently lesser-quality housing because it is not affordable. Refugees and migrants are expected to be significantly impacted by these issues as well. To illustrates this, based on European Web Site's (EWSI, 2016) survey on integration in 28 EU member countries, found that "migrants are usually vulnerable on housing market, disproportionately dependent on private rents, more likely to be unaware of their right and discriminated against".

The availability of acceptable housing for migrants is one that might be argued over while discussing housing difficulties among migrants. In addition, laws that restrict non-citizens from accessing public housing, burdensome bureaucracy, a lack of grievance mechanisms, inadequate information and advice, discrimination in the distribution of housing or financial assistance, and other factors limit access to public housing in the public sphere. Migrants frequently have limited financial resources, and the lack of personal job, financial documents, and income history are problems that frequently make it difficult to obtain finance for a property purchase.

Rental difficulties are also connected to issues with migrant housing. For instance, landlords are required to notify local authorities of the presence of any illegal immigrants they rent housing to since doing so against the national law. To execute a lease, tenants required to provide documents that, as undocumented immigrants, they do not already have or cannot get. Tenants need to register with the local authorities or tax authorities for residence permit, social security number, labour contract (United Nations, 2014). Besides that, migrants and refugees experienced rent affordability, which is related to the real monthly rent cost. The literature and studies that evaluate the difficulties that new immigrants face while trying to find private rental accommodation emphasises the continuance of direct discrimination. For instance, UNHCR (2013) noted that private landlords frequently refuse to rent to individuals who are entitled to international protection or place additional monetary and/or administrative restrictions on the lease. This could lead to a variety of problems, including overcrowding, unlawful letting, and subpar living conditions.

The housing needs of foreign workers in Malaysia were hampered by a number of major issues. Migrant workers often face difficulties finding affordable housing, as the cost of formal rental properties can be high, especially in urban areas where many job opportunities are concentrated. Access to affordable housing is critical for Malaysia's majority of migrant workers, many of whom come from low-income families. This group faces the problem of ensuring good living conditions while also dealing with decreasing wages, making inexpensive housing a vital aspect of their overall well-being. Inadequate housing can lead to overcrowded and unhygienic living circumstances, hurting the workers' health and dignity. Inadequate housing can have serious effects on workers' health, well-being, and dignity, particularly for migrant workers in Malaysia, who frequently live in substandard conditions. Overcrowding can result in cramped and uncomfortable living conditions, increasing the risk of disease and deteriorating overall living standards. Workers may lack privacy and personal space under such circumstances, which can have negative psychological and emotional

consequences. Furthermore, unhygienic living conditions can increase the prevalence of illnesses and the spread of communicable diseases, negatively impacting not only workers but also the larger community. These problems can also contribute to a cycle of poverty since the financial burdens associated with ill health and frequent medical expenses drain the limited resources of low-income employees. Addressing inadequate housing is critical not just for providing shelter, but also for preserving human dignity and ensuring the well-being of these vulnerable groups.

Photo: The condition of foreign workers housings in several areas in Malaysia

Source: Ministry of Local Government Development of Malaysia (2021)

3.2 To Investigate Potential Mitigation Measures for Workers Housing Issues

This section presents a variety of approaches and the methodology adopted for housing refugees and immigrants. The alternatives are divided into six groups according to themes. The first approach, which makes use of vacant and available properties, can assist migrants and refugees with their housing needs. Local governments lose tax revenue from vacant homes, and maintaining them costs money that could be used elsewhere. In this approach, there are two methods applied namely (1) revitalised blighted neighbourhood by repairing abandoned homes and relocating migrants and (2) refugees and encourage the economic resurgence of sparsely populated rural areas by luring immigrants and refugees to settle there. The Dream Neighbourhood project in City of Cleveland, United States was applied the first method with intends to rehabilitate three run-down neighbourhoods in Cleveland's downtown by renting out renovated unoccupied homes to immigrant and refugee families as rental homes. The City Council addresses the issue of unoccupied homes while taking into account that refugees are a worthwhile demographic to invest in, according to a 2013 report done by the Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland (Economic and Analytics, 2012). Another country which applied this approach was Leeds, West Yorkshire, United Kingdom under Canopy Housing project. In the city, there are 5,500 vacant housing units. As a result, the City Council has been funding numerous creative pro-

jects like Canopy that try to address the housing need by utilising these vacant homes. The Canopy Housing project aims to repair vacant and abandoned homes so that homeless persons, asylum seekers, and refugees can reside there. Employees of the association identify vacant homes in Leeds' Hyde Park and Beeston neighbourhoods to start the process. Afterward, they negotiate with the property's owner to transfer ownership of the building to the association. An agreement is reached, and construction work begins. For the purpose of setting up a home, new tenants are given the fundamental furniture, toiletries, and bedding. No deposit or advance rent payment is required because rent is kept at a modest level (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE], 2021).

Second approach is transforming temporary and emergency housing into long term solutions for migrants and refugees. For the housing of migrants, governments throughout the UNECE region have been adopting a variety of options, including collective centres, camps, hotels, mobile houses, etc. 2015 saw an increase in the number of refugees arriving in the city of Ghent and other European towns. More accommodations were made as a result of the crisis by the federal government. In an emergency, professionals assist them in finding the right accommodations. Ten transit houses, made accessible by the city of Ghent, are available for those who are unable to locate a suitable home within the allotted two months. Transit housing gives additional time to make sure refugees find suitable housing and receive the help they need to do so (Termont, 2017).

Third approach is enhancing migrant and refugee access to social housing. Three-quarters of the rental housing market in the Netherlands is made up of regulated social housing units. These homes are rented out by non-profit businesses and housing enterprises, which use their income to build high-standard, reasonably priced homes. The housing corporation offered tenants a EUR 100 rent discount as part of a five-year EUR 430 million investment initiative for the creation of 1,756 social housing sites provided they assisted refugees in assimilating into Dutch society. 85 refugees are now being housed by Trudo Housing Corporation (The Guardian, n.a).

Fourth approach, housing cooperatives (Coops) are a type of private company established by individuals with the purpose of facilitating their members' access to housing. Residents define the company's collective regulations and make choices affecting their living space. Residents are the collective managers of the company. Homes cooperatives' main goal is to offer decent, cost-effective housing (Milner, n.a). However, some have additional goals, such as promoting ecological practises or giving homes to certain populations, such the elderly, single moms, immigrants, and refugees. For example, the De Verre Bergen Foundation oversees the housing initiative known as Stichting New Home Rotterdam (SNTR). Since its establishment in 2011, this organisation has been actively involved in a variety of social programmes that support the integration of immigrants and refugees into Dutch society. The SNTR programme buys privately owned properties that have been on the market for more than six months in order to increase the supply of housing for refugees (Stichting De Verre Bergen, n.a). This strategy is intended to prevent locals who might be interested in relocating from having their homes taken away. On average, one apartment costs 100,000 euros, and migrants are required to pay rent on their home. This charge is

paid to the foundation, which utilises it to support the refugees' access to language instruction as well as assistance in finding employment and educational options.

Fifth approach is modular home for refugee and migrants. The delivery of housing, especially affordable housing, is hampered by the building industry's high construction costs, slow construction pace, and limited or overpriced land. The issues facing the construction industry might be overcome through the adoption of industrial approaches, such as prefabrication or modular systems. Any form of off-site manufacture followed by on-site assembly is referred to as an industrial approach to construction. In recent years, the construction of hundreds of thousands of prefabricated homes under government contracts has increased dramatically in Germany. Prefabricated housing projects that have been chosen demonstrate how such building techniques can be applied to both temporary housing for migrants and refugees while their applications are being processed (cases of Bad Soben, Tübingen, Königsbrunn, and Krißtel) and permanent housing solutions (cases of Ostfildern and Geneva). Because of the high standard of living they provide to newcomers, these housing complexes were chosen as examples of best practises for providing homes for migrants and refugees. The prefabricated dwelling structures seen above allow each family some privacy and the chance to have a family life that is as normal as possible, in contrast to most reception facilities where refugees must share their living space and which pay little attention to design. For instance, room is provided for kids to play outside and families are able to prepare their own food.

Sixth approach is improving the mechanisms for acquiring access to adequate homes. After receiving refugee status or subsidiary protection, asylum seekers are forced to leave their temporary housing or reception centres, and they must do so quickly: within two months in Belgium, 28 days in the United Kingdom, 15 days in Slovenia, and 14 days in Bulgaria. Refugees are not given any priority in Western European nations like the United Kingdom, France, or Germany. In several other nations, mainly in Eastern European nations like Bulgaria and Slovenia, refugees are required to independently find housing on the private housing market. As solution, for example in Belgium offers rehousing allowance. After leaving a welcome centre, a number of disadvantaged individuals, including recognised refugees, are eligible for the rehousing allowance benefit. It comprises of a:

1. Move allowance, which helps people move in and out, is worth EUR 808.03 + 10% for each new household member up to a maximum of three additional people. So a household could only receive a maximum move allowance of EUR 1050.44. Each family will only get this payment once.
2. Monthly rent allowance of EUR 156.56 plus 10% for each additional household member (up to a maximum of 5 more people). Therefore, a household's maximum monthly rent allowance is EUR 234.83. The rent subsidy is granted for a period of five years, and it is renewed once for an additional five years. The renewed rent allowance's amount has been reduced by 50%.

The Malaysian government has acknowledged the need of adhering to migrant workers' housing needs. To enhance their quality of life and access to affordable

housing, it has launched a number of projects. Creating migrant worker dormitories and raising migrant workers' housing quality are two of these approaches. The Malaysian government proposes centralised labour quarters (CLQ) for workers (foreign and local workers) in a specific location, as well as dedicated permanent/semipermanent structures outfitted with various facilities and equipment for workers' comfort. These centralised labour quarters will be constructed by developers/employers/accommodation operators and managed by the employer or a service provider. Therefore, employers or developers of employee accommodation can charge rental costs (depending on the availability of facilities offered). This CLQ will be appropriate for all employment sectors.

Photo: Centralised labour quarters in Brownfield area, Malaysia

Source: Ministry of Local Government Development of Malaysia (2021)



Photo: Permanent Centralised labour quarters in new area, Westlite, Tampoi, Johor, Malaysia

Source: Ministry of Local Government Development of Malaysia (2021)



Photo: Semi-Permanent Centralised labour quarters in new area, Sungai Buloh, Selangor, Malaysia

Source: Ministry of Local Government Development of Malaysia (2021)



4 Conclusion

Integration of refugees and migrants depends on their living circumstances and housing arrangements. Integration won't be successful until housing is equally accessible to refugees, migrants, and native-born people, and unless multicultural living situations are encouraged. Organizing and administering housing facilities, as well as providing housing for refugees and migrants, are tasks performed by governmental at the national, regional, and local authorities level as well as non-governmental organisations. For the aforementioned two principles to be realised, there must be collaboration between these various stakeholders in the housing market, and any housing solution should include housing along with social counselling and integration programmes. A person's or a family's housing is the cornerstone of stability and security. A home should be a sanctuary—a place to live in peace, security, and dignity, because

it is the centre of our social, emotional, and occasionally economic existence. Housing is most critically a human right but is increasingly seen as a commodity. According to international law, having a secure lease is necessary to be appropriately housed. In article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 11.1 of the 1966 International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the right to appropriate housing is acknowledged as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living. Since then, several international human rights agreements have acknowledged or made reference to the right to appropriate housing, or at least some of its components, like the protection of one's privacy and home.

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