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Edited by Maurizio Bergamaschi

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL HOUSING DEPRIVATION



Edited by  
Maurizio Bergamaschi

# The multidimensional housing deprivation

Local dynamics  
of inequality, policies  
and challenges for the future

SOCIOLOGIA DEL TERRITORIO



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Within the framework of the activities of the H2020 MICADO (Migrant Integration Cockpits and Dashboards) project, this volume brings together a set of contributions on contemporary housing, which represents one of the areas, although not the only one, in which migrants experience a condition of major vulnerability compared to the native population and that hinders their full integration in their new living context and full social participation. Migrants' request for housing is part of the broader context of housing-related problems still unresolved in our country: although they share most of the difficulties encountered by the most vulnerable segments of the native population, at the same time they face a set of additional disadvantages induced by the institutional system, linked to their precarious legal status, and by the market.

This contribution, organized in three thematic sessions (*Local models and processes of ethnic residential segregation; From housing deprivation to housing policies. Distinctive elements in the territory; Housing rights, migrant integration, and the role of ICT solutions*), analyzes housing needs both from a theoretical point of view, to prompt insights into the distinctive features of the new housing issue, but also by reporting the findings of empirical research that can provide elements of evaluation and methodological indications on the topic.

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## *Index*

<b>Introduction. The multidimensional housing deprivation. Local dynamics of inequality, policies, and challenges for the future,</b> by <i>Maurizio Bergamaschi</i>	p.	9
<b>Local models and processes of ethnic residential segregation</b> by <i>Maria Grazia Montesano, Luca Daconto</i>	»	13
<b>Hospitality and segregation in Turin. An ethnographic perspective on migration, reception policies and urban conflicts,</b> by <i>Erasmus Sossich</i>	»	15
<b>The localization models of secondary reception structures for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. First results from the MIGRATE project,</b> by <i>Luca Bottini, Simone Caiello, Luca Daconto, Sara Giunti</i>	»	28
<b>The issue of housing and migrants. The role of women in social movements for housing rights, from stereotypes to social activism,</b> by <i>Francesca Colella, Giovanna Gianturco, Mariella Nocenzi</i>	»	39
<b>The residential dynamics of foreign populations at the metropolitan scale. The cases of Bologna and Milan (2001-2011),</b> by <i>Luca Daconto, Maria Grazia Montesano</i>	»	50

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>From housing deprivation to housing policies. Distinctive elements in the territory</b> by <i>Manuela Maggio, Alice Lomonaco</i></p>	p. 63
<p><b>The gap between supply trends and access to affordable housing in Italy. The need for new lines of public action,</b> by <i>Alice Selene Boni, Liliana Padovani</i></p>	» 67
<p><b>Public housing policies and the secondary aid network of Caritas Diocesana in Bologna,</b> by <i>Beatrice Acquaviva, Gloria Bonora, Gianluigi Chiaro</i></p>	» 79
<p><b>Assessing assisted tenancy as a tool to promote affordability in the Italian private rental market,</b> by <i>Igor Costarelli, Silvia Mugnano, Aurora Cortazzo</i></p>	» 92
<p><b>Living in a rental in Bologna between housing dynamics and migration trends,</b> by <i>Alice Lomonaco, Manuela Maggio</i></p>	» 106
<p><b>Widespread hospitality and social inclusion of migrants: an opportunity to regenerate rural areas,</b> by <i>Karen Urso</i></p>	» 121
<p><b>Genoa's Biscione from the 1960s until today. From a stigmatised neighbourhood to a place where "it is nice to live",</b> by <i>Francesco Gastaldi, Federico Camerin</i></p>	» 134
<p><b>Resilience &amp; adaptation: social housing and mixité in post-Covid Milan,</b> by <i>Silvia Mugnano, Alessandra Terenzi</i></p>	» 148
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing rights, migrant integration, and the role of ICT solutions</b> by <i>Teresa Carlone, Carolina Mudan Marelli</i></p>	» 157
<p><b>Beyond emergency housing and social exclusion. The integration of territorial actions and good practices into ITC tools: Greece and Italy,</b> by <i>Giulia M. Foresti, Anna Lauricella, Dimitris Demertzis, Kalliopi Kati, Alessandro Pollini, Alessandro Caforio</i></p>	» 161

**Limits and opportunities of ICT in access to the housing market for the migrant population. Considerations starting from the Bologna case in the MICADO project, by *Carolina Mudan Marelli, Teresa Carlone***

p. 177

*Limits and opportunities of ICT in access  
to the housing market for the migrant population.  
Considerations starting from the Bologna case  
in the MICADO project*

by *Carolina Mudan Marelli, Teresa Carlone*<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

This contribution is focused on the relationship between migrants, housing issue, and new technologies and is part of a broader reflection developed within the European Horizon 2020 project MICADO<sup>2</sup> started in 2019 and ends in June 2022. The MICADO project aimed to develop new technologies that could facilitate the integration process of migrants by providing innovative services capable of intervening in some of the main dimensions of social integration processes: work, health, education-training, housing.

In the following pages, we will first present the state of the art of studies on the issue of migrants' housing, which was carried out using a vast corpus of articles, reports, and programmes, which was constructed through the method of systematic literature review<sup>3</sup>. Systematic Literature Reviews (SLR) provide robust, reliable summaries of the most reliable evidence, a valuable backdrop on which decisions about policies can be drawn. The SLR is meant to review and synthesize evidence on social interventions and public policy. The overall objectives of this SLR are: obtain a general picture of documents related with migrants/asylum seekers/refugees' integration in the last five years; study different associations about policies for migrant integration implemented in the last decade, and their effectiveness if possible, performing a more exhaustive study in the sectoral policies of health,

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<sup>3</sup> The SLR is based on the Campbell Systematic Review, an adaptation of the Social Sciences of the Cochrane Systematic Reviews, the leading journal and database for systematic reviews in health care.

housing, education, employment and participation; find individual characteristics and contextual factors affecting integration; record policy outcomes. With this purpose, each Consortium's city (Antwerp, Bologna, Hamburg and Madrid) conducted a systematic literature review that included: all articles in the Web of Science from the last 5 years that included the term migrant OR refugee OR asylum seeker OR ethnic OR newcomer (in English, Dutch, Italian, German and Spanish) AND integration OR inclusion OR assimilation (in English, Dutch, Italian, German and Spanish) AND country OR list of all regions OR list of main cities (Belgium, Italy, Germany and Spain); a selection of local or national reports from the main organizations that deal with migrants and refugees in the city<sup>4</sup>; this selection was completed at a European level with reports from the main organizations (EU, EC, OECD, etc.) dealing with migrants and refugees. In general, each topic presented below contains a brief introduction based on this EU literature followed by the SLR analysis.

In the first part of this contribution, we will show how in fact the housing issue is crucial to the success of any integration process. But obtaining housing for migrants within the European context, as the literature has shown, calls into question contextual factors and individual characteristics that in many cases represent a major barrier to housing integration. Secondly, starting from the research material collected during the first two years of the project, we will focus on the case of Bologna, a city that was part of the four pilot cities involved in the project (together with Hamburg, Madrid and Antwerp). As we will show, the processes of facilitating the housing integration of migrants through the use of new technologies, however promising they may be, show structural limits, i.e. not attributable to the researchers' choices and possibilities, but due to greater causes, such as the availability and ownership of data on available housing, which has an important impact on the possibility of updating them automatically, or the presence of strong forms of stigmatisation of migrant living and of real racist attitudes towards them; up to the issue of social housing, which sees a strong process of digitisation of application procedures, procedures that clash with the not always sufficient level of technological skills of migrants applying.

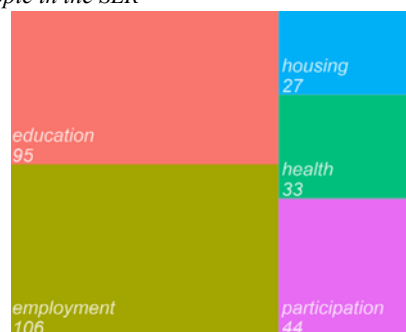
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<sup>4</sup> In the case of Antwerp, the reports were of non-governmental and non-profit organisations or specific projects on the subject (especially on housing). For Bologna, reports from the Italian Statistical Office (ISTAT) on immigration and other reports by non-profit organisations such as Caritas Migrantes. In Hamburg a monoCharty on a specific concept of integration that is of major relevance for the German context, as well as five reports from regional and state organisations were added. In Spain some reports of the NGO CEAR (Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid) and the Permanent Migrant Observatory linked to the Ministry of Employment and Migration were included.

## 1. Housing and migrants' integration

Access to quality housing is determinant to migrants' integration, well-being, security, stability and educational outcomes (Diaz Ramirez, Liebig, Thoreau, Veneri, 2018; Rechel, 2011). It is also instrumental to the integration process, as an address is many times needed to claim residence rights, financial support, health insurance, etc. There is a consensus in the fact that integration is a multi-dimensional concept, although there is not such a clear agreement on what its main dimensions are. This difficulty is due to the strong interrelation between different dimension that affect the integration process of migrant, for example employment integration is strongly affected by education, while education is affected by access to quality housing that also intervenes in physical and mental health, which in turn is affected amongst other things by precarity or overqualification in employment. At the same time, some dimensions are clearly more fundamental for the migrant's life, as housing and employment. On the topic of employment and migrants' integration, there are countless scholarly publications that have analysed the relationship between this and the integration processes of migrants, while on the topic of housing and migrant's integration there is limited academic literature (Pannecoucke, De Decker, 2015). This is primarily due to the lack of a systematic data collection and analysis on migrants' housing and living situation. As clearly show in the literature review (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) there is a significantly higher number of studies in the domains of education and employment in general, while there are very few studies and innovative action on housing at European level, as well as with regard with the national scientific literature on this topic. Although most research applies qualitative methodologies, with an extensive amount of ethnographic research. A quantitative approach to data analysis is found especially in the fields of employment, health, and education.

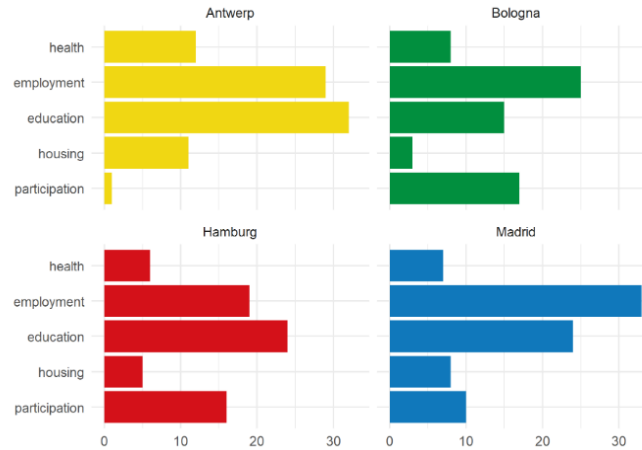
Fig. 1 - Most frequent topic in the SLR



Source: D 1.2 Migration challenges for Micado



Fig. 2 - Most research topics by city in the SLR



Source: D 1.2 Migration challenges for Micado

## 2. Characteristics of the housing situation of migrants

Statistical information on the housing situation of immigrants is not easily accessible yet. The share of owners is significantly lower among migrants than natives, and particularly low among non-EU foreigners.

Migrants are also statistically more likely to live in an overcrowded household than native-born population, in all age groups and all countries. However, Italy shows the highest overcrowding rates which was among the EU-born eight times higher than for their peers in Spain and roughly three times higher than for their peers in Germany and Belgium. Spain and Italy present the more polarized distribution with a low rate among nationals and high rates among foreign citizens. Here we must acknowledge national differences in Germany where the rent culture is firmly established among nationals, so differences between them and EU-born and non-EU born people seem less significant. On the other hand, countries like Spain or Italy where homeowners are the main trend among nationals, increase the differences between them and those who struggle with financial constraints and legal limitations to buy a home. These difficulties duplicate the barriers to rent a home in which private contracts and tenants tend to ask for more guarantees from the migrant population than from nationals. Moreover, the countries where housing is more regulated by governments tend to show that non-nationals encounter fewer barriers to access housing. Another explanation could be the lack or hidden information regarding these questions which

makes it more difficult to be addressed by both scientific research and institutions. In most countries, foreigners are facing a higher likelihood to be overburdened. The housing cost overburden rate is defined as the share of the population living in households where the total cost of housing accounts for more than 40% of a household's disposable income (Eurostat, 2018, p. 43). Germany is the only country where there are no signs for a particularly high incidence of overburdening among foreigners. Non-EU foreigners are not systematically confronted more often with the issue of overburdening. Spain and Italy present the most polarized distribution with a low rate among nationals and high rates among foreign people. Scholars have emphasized the role of local and regional levels in the relationship between migration and housing since migrants are more likely to rent, live in substandard housing and concentrate in specific areas, which can cause an impact on local infrastructures and the perception of immigration (Diaz Ramirez, Liebig, Thoreau, Veneri, 2018). The role of the local and regional levels in particularly important according to the literature and regulations in the housing dimension this is the level where the regulation is organized but Policy actions in this area are fragmented across different authorities and often-voluntary work of NGOs and initiatives is crucial.

### **3. Contextual characteristics affecting housing integration**

The housing situation affecting the migrant population does not develop in a social vacuum. As is evident from the literature, the characteristics of the socio-economic context of the migrants' country of arrival, as well as the national legislations plays a fundamental role, offering or inhibiting possibilities of access, both to the housing market and to entire areas of cities, which tend to reject the migrant presence. For example, unfavourable legislation makes it sometimes difficult for migrants to enjoy financial and social network advantages (Mahieu *et al.*, 2019). Many asylum seekers stay in secondary accommodation facilities even though their application has already been approved due to packed housing markets and a lack of information and support in finding their own flat (El-Kayed, Hamann, 2018). The residency requirement additionally obliges every person with a granted asylum to reside in the federal state where the asylum procedure took place. Having the ability to access an adequate and stable home opens, on the other hand, the possibility of family reunification, that is not an automatic right, not only in Spain (Vickstrom, González-Ferrer, 2016), but also in Italy, Belgium and

Germany. So, to have poor housing conditions decrease the integration capacity for migrants.

In addition to the structural barriers, migrants encounter supplementary obstacles and difficulties (Mahieu, Ravn, 2017): one of the biggest is discrimination (Benhaddou, Devriendt, 2014; Verhaeghe, 2017; 2018; Winters *et al.*, 2013). Migrants are often dependent on social welfare and turn to social welfare institutions for paying a deposit (Mahieu, Ravn, 2017), this can be an additional barrier for private homeowners to accept them as tenants (Winters *et al.*, 2013). First generation migrants are more often discriminated compared to other migrant generations (Pannecoucke, De Decker, 2015).

Discrimination by landlords is another contextual characteristic that affect the housing integration process. Dill *et al.* (2015) list the fear of unstable rent payments, prejudice and slower housing value appreciation as the main reasons of landlords discriminating against migrants (2015, p. 357). El-Kayed and Hamann (2018) state that this discrimination is common with both, private house owners renting out individual flats as well as non-profit housing companies working on a bigger scale (2018, p. 142). The massive disadvantage people without a German citizenship, with a migrant background or even only with a non-German name are exposed to, led to the practice of some supporter groups renting apartments on their own to then sublet them to migrant tenants (El-Kayed, Hamann, 2018). Even if non-profit and non-governmental organizations regularly publish reports with policy recommendations (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2017; Winters *et al.*, 2013), policy actions are fragmented as different authorities are authorized to develop policy.

To address housing issues by policy makers is to invest in proper data collection (Noppe *et al.*, 2018a; Struyck *et al.*, 2018). The often-voluntary work of NGOs and initiatives is crucial. El-Kayed and Hamann (2018) describe an initiative that developed a web-based matching platform that brings together offers for rooms in shared flats and refugees (2018, p. 143). However, these are small-scale ideas that do not match with the number of refugees and migrants waiting for appropriate housing.

The integration policy index (MIPEX) shows an overall better performance for Germany and Belgium, being the latter who obtains the best scores according to MIPEX. Scholars agreed on highlighting the pernicious effect of unfavourable legislation that limits migrants' scope of action. For example, forbidding them to move or change homes or sometimes making it difficult for migrants to enjoy financial benefits and the advantages of social networks, like reducing their integration allowances if they share a flat.

Space plays a crucial role on integration, which also brings to light the importance of place-based interventions. Cities differ substantially from each other in their diversity. Furthermore, within cities, a large and varied diversity is found across neighbourhoods. Migrants often live in segregated neighbourhoods together with other foreigners, which may provide networks that might be beneficial for as regards looking for a job but makes social contact with natives difficult. In literature on residential segregation there are two strands of studies that attempt to explain this phenomenon, with one suggesting that immigrants voluntarily sort themselves into ethnic enclaves and the other suggesting that discrimination is the main reason for ethnic concentrations and is actually unwanted (Dill *et al.*, 2015, p. 363). Added to a lack of essential information and knowledge about the housing markets, which are increasingly tense in many German cities, refugees have limited access to housing due to federal laws (El-Kayed, Hamann, 2018, p. 142).

#### **4. Individual characteristics affecting housing integration for migrants'**

Housing is crucial in migrants' integration process, as an own address is a compulsory requirement to claim residence rights, obtain financial support and health insurance, etc. (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016). Housing offers security and stability and is a lifelong growth asset, as well as being a measure of economic success that promotes or impedes social inclusion processes. Being deprived of shelter is one of the most crucial hurdles immigrants face during the integration process. Some authors identify homeownership and living conditions as among the most important aspects of the immigrant assimilation process.

Housing design, as well as the materiality and design of public spaces have a direct impact on a person's well-being (Eckenwiler, 2018, p. 563). In addition, it shapes a sense of belonging, has an impact on community relationships and enables access to healthcare, education and employment (Phillips, 2006 cited in Mahieu, Ravn, 2017). In a similar understanding, Levecque and van Rossem (2015, p. 50) underline the importance of being able to «root oneself» and to «produce [...] a feeling of settling down' successfully at a new place». This practice seems particularly important for refugees who experienced prosecution and is connected to a feeling of uncertainty and not belonging. Thus, studies stress the significance of an early transit of refugees from shelters to individual housing (El-Kayed, Hamann, 2018, p. 135) as well as diverse and interconnected neighbourhoods (Dill *et al.*, 2015; Kruse, 2017).

The three most discussed topics in literature are spatial distribution, discrimination in the housing market and the more precarious living conditions of migrants compared to natives. Migrants more often rent their house, live more frequently in an apartment, live in low-quality housing with less comfort, they have less space, live in older houses and spend a larger amount of their family income on housing costs (Noppe *et al.*, 2018a; Pannecoucke, De Decker, 2015). Furthermore, migrants are overrepresented when it comes to social housing. The proportion of candidate-tenants for social housing of non-EU citizens is also higher and is increasing. These migrant groups report more financial difficulties related to living expenses, running costs and other housing-related expenses (Noppe *et al.*, 2018b).

Migrants often find themselves in a precarious position regarding housing availability and are restricted to a limited segment of the housing market, i.e. the 'private, secondary market', referring to low quality houses in unattractive neighborhoods but still with a high rental (Pannecoucke, De Decker, 2015). People with a non-EU background are more often dissatisfied with their living conditions (Noppe *et al.*, 2018). One out of three houses of non-EU citizens are inadequate, against one out of ten houses inhabited by Belgians. In Spain, (Colom Andrés, Molés Machí, 2017) find that immigrants are less likely to own their primary residence in Spain, even though it is the more usual form of housing. For immigrants, tertiary studies increase the likelihood of being owners.

The concept of homophily - the tendency to rather interact with people of a similar background and experiences - can be used to explain the voluntary formation of ethnic districts. Dill *et al.* further state that these enclaves may provide 'informal information networks' that are beneficial, for example, for finding a job (2015, p. 354). Simultaneously, she found that migrants are rather unhappy to live in a segregated fashion with practically no contact with natives (2015, p. 354). Moreover Kruse *et al.* state that exclusive same-ethnic friendship preferences can be problematic for ethnically diverse societies, since they enhance negative interethnic attitudes (2016, p. 130). At the same time, there are studies about very diverse neighborhoods, where people had less trust in each other (Koopmans, Schaeffer, 2016, p. 971). Following these examples, on the one hand, neighborhoods should be developed with a diverse population and, on the other, they should provide people with incentives and possibilities to meet and interact with each other, to overcome prejudice, increase mutual understanding and create a sense of social cohesion. Along these lines, the geographic distance between Muslims and Spaniards has increased in recent years as a consequence of increased hostility towards this ethnic group, which has settled in segregated areas (Edling *et al.*, 2016).

Language proficiency does not play a role in discrimination in Belgium (Coenen, Van der Bracht, Van de Putte, 2015). Regarding the specific group of asylum seekers and refugees, other challenges are added to previous obstacles: while they are waiting for the decision on their asylum application, they are bound to be living in a reception housing system where living conditions are far from optimal. The current reception model prioritizes collective housing, which is contradictory to the needs of this vulnerable migrant group (Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2017). In collective reception centers, privacy and autonomy are compromised, and residents report they feel unsafe. When a residence permit is obtained, the migrants are often pressed by time limits set by the government: two months are granted (extendable by a maximum of one month) to find housing, which is extremely difficult given their limited knowledge of the local language and housing market, but also to overcome various (institutional and/or administrative) barriers, and the limited available options due to - amongst others - discrimination (Mahieu, Ravn, 2017; Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, 2016).

Space plays a crucial role in integration. Conceptualizing all people as being embedded socially and spatially sheds focus on the spatial aspect of integration (Eckenwiler, 2018). Current debates and conflicts related to the lack of adequate housing and the growing heterogeneity of urban populations call for a spatial turn in migration studies. Regarding the urban space as places that are created and sustained, transformed, or neglected in ways that foster or perpetuate inequities generates implications concerning place-making as a crucial process in migration and integration. This also calls for the importance of place-based interventions (Eckenwiler, 2018). Cities differ substantially from each other in their diversity. Furthermore, within cities, a large diversity and variety is found across neighborhoods. This goes along with the significant differences in lifestyles and socio-economic inequalities (Oosterlynck, Verschraegen, Van Kempen, 2018). Studies have focused on the effects of neighbourhoods and specific research areas (for example, a city or a neighbourhood), target populations and local urban policies. This allows them to delve deeper into the effects of the area and grasp all parts of these effects to the fullest. Furthermore, it prevents researchers from interpreting research results in ethnic terms. Effects of a neighborhood or area are seen as potential ways to impact the lives of the inhabitants of these areas, and increase their life chances, social cohesion in society and improve their living environment. The basic assumption of these studies is that there are 'neighborhood effects' or 'contextual effects of the living environment', suggesting that features of people's living environment impact the inhabitants of the area, regardless of their individual characteristics. Local policymakers have

applied this perspective, shifting from a pluralist recognition of ethno-cultural diversity, and even the inclusion of various forms of diversity, to a neo-assimilationist approach (Albeda, Oosterlynck, 2018). Increasing emphasis is put on securitization, which considered ethnic diversity rather as a threat to the city's social cohesion or a social problem. This shift also impacted how policymakers have redistributed their resources. More attention has been given to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities and people's individual responsibilities to integrate with society, to achieve upward social mobility and contribute to society (in an economic way) (Saeys *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, since 1982, increasingly more policy initiatives have been undertaken to stimulate neighborhood-oriented policies, which in the end also attracted an increasing number of middle-class groups to previously deprived neighborhoods, with the purpose of stimulating quality of life, economy and security (Albeda, Oosterlynck, 2018).

Two main lines of research can be distinguished. A first line focuses on how neighborhoods are ethnically diverse, and how this growing super-diversity impacts the lives of the inhabitants *and* the neighborhood itself. Here the focus lies on the unequal distribution of people across neighborhoods, and how these patterns are in line with already existing social inequalities. This means that in most cases the most vulnerable or poorest groups in society, such as many migrants, live together in the same neighborhoods, which in turn, are also often the deprived or the poorest ones (Albeda, Oosterlynck, 2018; Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht, Van de Putte, 2012; Geldof, 2013; Fleischmann *et al.*, 2013; Albeda *et al.*, 2018; Oosterlynck, Verschraegen, Van Kempen, 2018).

A second line of research concentrates more on the links these neighborhoods have with migration patterns (Schillebeeckx *et al.*, 2019; Schrooten *et al.*, 2019). The importance of having local social networks within a particular urban zone or neighborhood is found to facilitate the arrival of newcomers within this city and promote migrant integration. The increasingly superdiversity in cities has reshaped urban space and the position of migrants. This increases the number of transnational contacts and networks of these migrants. Hence, more trans-migrants can be found within the large migrant population, complicating the functioning of these super-diverse societies. When this group of trans-migrants arrives in a relatively deprived neighborhood or area, and is faced with undesirable living conditions, these living conditions may stimulate them to migrate even more rapidly and put less effort in settling within the society where they are currently living (Schrooten *et al.*, 2012). Some interesting dynamics of identity formation in public space appropriation carried out by some Latin-American migrant groups in Seville were found by Martín-Díaz and Cuberos-Gallardo (2016).

Some authors point out that the most vulnerable populations in Italy have gradually been expelled from urban centers (as in other European cities), stressing that ‘cities have become economically hostile areas of life for part of the population, especially for social areas outside the residual public supply of houses, which, at the same time, are below the income levels set by the market for access to housing’ (Avallone, Torre, 2016). However, with the bursting of the real estate bubble at the start of the century and the economic crisis of 2008, these processes have accelerated, and counter-trends have reached maturity: the ‘housing careers’ of migrants have been interrupted, or have even taken a step backwards, bringing migrants back to previous housing situations, rejecting them to conditions of precariousness and homelessness (Tosi, 2017). A compilation that shows the reverse trend in home ownership effectively shows the trend of overall sales and purchases concluded by immigrants in the period between 2006 and 2010. The drop in the five-year period is almost fifty percent (Petrillo, 2018).

On the other hand, in Spanish rural areas, some villages have implemented different programs to attract migrant population to rural settings. As Sampedro and Camarero (2018) show, there are different initiatives from councils and different groups, such as agricultural trade unions or non-governmental organizations, in which municipalities provide work or housing to newcomers.

Policy discourses and initiatives have undergone some changes in the organization of urban space and ethnic diversity, which have also clearly impacted individuals’ outcomes. Simultaneously, migration patterns and flows alter over time. This intertwinement also applies to the impact of policy on integration outcomes. Policy changes are hard to evaluate as they coincide with changing migration patterns, economic trends, and globalization changes. For example, many initiatives in Antwerp (Saeys *et al.*, 2014) focus on the creation and stimulation of social cohesion. However, more projects are oriented at social mobility and to a lesser extent at enhancing the economic performance of the city, and their success depends on the available financial resources. Finally, due to new and ever-changing urban environments, local policy makers and social workers have to constantly re-organise their work (trans-migrants: Schrooten *et al.*, 2019; Roma population: Hemelsoet, Van Pelt, 2015).

## **5. Migrants integration and housing in Bologna: the MICADO case**

As previously stated, the MICADO project intent to facilitate the exchange among migrants, public authorities and engaged civic society and ease migrants’ access to regular social systems. Among those, housing is one



main topic to be address and the project aims in undertake it through attractive digital services. In the latest years we witnessed an increasing use of this kind of technologies in tacking societal challenges it's important to critically analyse the impact of this phenomenon on people's and institutions' life. As we are still in the process of experimenting ICT in the housing field it's crucial to monitor and evaluate the possible outcome of its use.

This section will be dedicated to the description and analysis of the main obstacles and opportunities in using digital instruments and/or platforms in the housing process for foreign people and their role played in the mitigation of the main urgent aspect linked the right to housing for migrants. As presented in the previous paragraphs, there is a combination of various and multiple factors that play a relevant role in searching and acquire a living situation that is suitable for migrants' needs. A lot of obstacles and paradoxical side effect could come to life and make this research complex and frustrating. In order to understand (or at least identify) some of them and propose some solutions, the following paragraph will share some reflections arose from interviews conducted within the MICADO project in Bologna. The methodological choice to focus on this city only (leaving behind the other 3 pilot cities: Hamburg, Madrid, and Antwerp) is linked to the peculiarity of the housing (private and public) system and the need to define a specific context in which to conduct the research activities. The UNIBO research group conducted a series of interviews with asylum seekers and refugees' service providers and local authorities in Bologna in June and July 2019, together with a total of 4 workshops involving 4 different groups of migrants (asylums seekers, women, migrants who have been living in Bologna for more than ten years and families) in July-August 2019 to identify some of the main criticalities that migrants face in their everyday life on health, education, work and housing. Nevertheless, the housing dimension has proved to be the one most affected by conflicts and problems that hinder the access of migrants and their integration process.

In this field, the most debated issues were access to rented housing through the private market and access to social housing. Except in the workshops with asylum seekers, in which the migrants present, forced to reside in the SRPAR and CAS facilities, have not yet been confronted with the issue of access to housing and, in short, do not know neither the obstacles nor the facilitating factors. Migrants, except for asylum seekers, have all expressed deep disappointment with the dynamics of searching for rented accommodation, although some positive elements have emerged. In short, we could identify these hindering factors that go through the housing issue for migrants since their arrival in Bologna, to date: low or precarious income and wages;

regulation of rental contracts; legal status of the migrant subject to annual renewal of the residence permit; racial discrimination and strong cultural prejudices; difficulty in seeking information and clarification and public institutions real estate. Moreover, these difficulties are exacerbated by some of the specificities of the Bolognese context, its strong university character, and the intensification of tourism in the last decade. Among the facilitating factors, on the other hand, the role of family members, people from work and the solidity of compatriot's networks are often a valid support for migrants in finding a decent accommodation. It is not unexpected that some of the dynamics described in the previous paragraphs were confirmed by the experiences of the migrants involved in the workshops and the authorities interviewed. To some extent then, this confirmation allowed the researchers to explore, together with those involved, some aspects related to the potential of the use of technological tools to mitigate the main obstacles in the housing search. Even though the digitalization of communications in the market seems to be one of the main steps to improve efforts in looking and obtaining a house, the interviewee pointed out how there are multiple challenges that impede a definitive solution to guarantee a decent, stable, and affordable housing. Among the important and numerous inputs given during the in-depth interview it's possible to cluster four principal themes which were themselves analyzed with a look at the limitations and opportunities they present in the context of interventions aimed at improving housing policies.

## **6. What are the limits and opportunities in using an ICT solution?**

This paragraph attempt to define the boundaries within which ICT solutions can effectively represent a significant facilitation and help in the search for housing, in guaranteeing equal access to the private and public real estate market and in acting as a support for the PA and the local authorities that manage these services. As a first topic, from the research emerged that there is a partial presence of data on real estate listings and housing availability. Probably linked to the multiplicity of actors and structures involved, but also the complex procedures which it is necessary to pass in order to obtain housing, migrants are very often confronted with a fragmented landscape of missing data, partial information, and endless ads that are no longer valid or lapsed.

Services not integrated enough with each other and strong sectorization; poor knowledge of migrant regulations and judgments. (int #2, CSO)

We've been trying to put together databases for years, but until institutions stop being self-referential and want to pool everything. (int.#3, social service)

You look for ads online and don't understand if they are still valid, you call, and no one answers. There are ads from months before and you don't understand half the things. In order to get a residence permit, the house has to have specific requirements, and these are not always clear until you go to see the house. If you can. (wks #3, long staying migrants)

In fact, there is a partial presence of data on real estate listings and housing availability, and the need to constantly update makes them fragmented and inconsistent, increasing the complexity to build a reliable and up-to-date database at the city level. In this scenario, being unfamiliar with language and digital tools then becomes an additional factor in excluding migrants from a competitive and compulsive process such as looking for a home in the private market. It is no better in the public housing sector, which suffers from the same difficulty in producing up-to-date, accessible, and easy-to-understand data. The need to rely on mediating institutions can navigate migrants within the complex world of housing, in fact, represent yet another hindrance in the process of acquiring housing and existential independence and autonomy, as well as integration with the area of residence. On the other hand, this criticality could be an additional opportunity for nudging the migrant's integration service system and PA to integrate other database and to invest in digital infrastructures. As discussed in a MICADO collateral research on integration of digital infrastructures (Carlone, Maggio, Marelli, 2022) the updating and interoperability of databases and information centres on city services represents a major challenge in the field of integration processes of the migrant population with the territories in which they decide to settle. Identify this technological step as a possible facilitation also for home search and to traverse more nimbly in the housing market could accelerate the digitization process already underway in some institutional areas and promote real technological innovation in this field.

We have started to build a project of a Platform on Housing, condensing all the information for all those who have problems with housing, a citizens platform for all, not only for migrants or only for people in vulnerable situations. (int. #3, social service)

On the case-announcement issue, it might be interesting to have a space where announcements are exchanged. For example, an elderly lady contacted services because she previously hosted a refugee's family and now in agreement with social she gets rent and reimbursements for hosting young migrants. You could

make matches between lonely elderly people who have homes with migrants who have serious housing problems. (int. #4 social service)

Second topic, that clearly became evident from the workshops with families and migrants who have been living in Bologna for more than ten years is the dynamics of racial discrimination that many (if not most) migrants face while searching for housing in the private market. Not infrequently, in the Bolognese context, Migrants find themselves excluded from market logics that become increasingly competitive and inaccessible to their needs. As one might expect, the reasons for this hostile and closed attitude are never overt and leave little, if any, room to explore the causes of exclusion or rejection.

Income, contract is the first... But that's not enough. The problem is racism, and they don't want foreigners in their home. Only a\*\*\*\*\* give it to you, if you want an apartment like all Italians, it's impossible. I have all the square meters requirements for a family reunification, but they want the consent of the owner of the house to bring a family member ... but it is illegal. The police ask for the owner's document and his consent. (wks #4, long staying migrants)

You get answered, during calls, "no immigrants" or other excuses where they prefer rent to students. (int. #3 Social service)

The issue clearly rests on cultural and social issues that can hardly be reduced to a single cause and therefore cannot be solved by a single measure. In the face of this awareness, therefore we are confronted with an issue that technologies can remedy in a limited way if not entering a very delicate field that rather requires tight methods of control and verification of information (e.g., reporting "racist" posts on the housing lists). The issue poses quite a few critical issues, first and foremost the methods of control and moderation of content present online, the reporting of "owners who discriminate", or the constant monitoring and updating of databases or lists based on these reports. Thus, a question arises related to who is in charge of monitoring these reports: the community? An institution? Civil society organizations? The question remains outstanding and unresolved.

In addition to the fact that - since these are socially unaccepted behaviors, albeit spread across all neighborhoods of the city - very often these discriminations take place in an untraceable way: refusal to answer the phone, refusal to show the house with more or less plausible excuses etc. Ads for overtly exclusionary housing availabilities e.g. "no renting to foreigners" are very fragmented and very often do not travel the airwaves so the possibility of online intervention is parceled out.

In Bologna, the most serious problem I don't think is jobs, or schooling where there are not many problems, but housing is a cross-cutting problem, it affects everyone, but for foreigners in addition there is that they are poorer and struggle more with the private market but there is also a specific discrimination that affects them as foreigners. (int #1, PA)

However, taking widespread awareness of racial discrimination in housing access, if properly mapped and discussed/shared with integration support services and administration, can help raise awareness and promote higher level of control in institutional lists and datasets. This monitoring can also be supported by ICT devices-apps and review platforms - but it requires great coordination skills and ability to and ability to operate in synergy-including through the possibility of data exchange and shared updating of databases. The complexity of the housing demand for migrants is also articulated by starting from the concept that the housing transition phase is a much more complex process than simply "looking for housing".

The first difficulty is finding a home in a city like Bologna with a student pressure. There are national laws that limit the basic possibilities of migrants and housing, and all camps are affected. If you don't have a house, you don't renew your residence permit, which is the only thing that allows you to stay in Italy. In recent months it has become even more difficult. For those who are here recently there is a problem of language, understanding the system and finding home. (wks #4, long staying migrants)

For us a decent house must be large, bright, with multiple rooms, you cannot stay with your children in the room all the time as here, they must also have a space for them. (wks #2, family in transition)

The statements of local authorities - who are faced with the phenomenon of housing transition, supporting families or individuals on the path to autonomy- speak of a multiplicity of issues and criteria that must exist for the process to take place in a lasting way. Obtaining a housing solution that is stable, decent, and can meet in the needs of those who live in it require levels of autonomy in terms of work, language, access to services and facilities.

The housing transition is a more complex accompaniment than finding a home. Let's make a total evaluation of autonomy, let's try to understand why they were in a situation of homelessness, because then there is not a single cause, there are many. They've been evicted. Usually, they are the loss of work and networks of relationships and you act them to rebuild a number of things. (int. #4 social service)

In this day and age, just any job is not enough to get housing; you must have a stable job, an Italian guarantor, you must not have too many children (int. #3 social service)

For this reason, the third topic addressed and discussed with the people interviewed is oriented on the use of technology as a tool that can ease the communication with local authorities, and civil society organization and help keeping track of all the task to be carried out to obtain a house. Clearly, the ICT solution is collateral to a process of accompaniment that involves services in the search for housing, thus slowing down the process of autonomy and independence in housing but also educational, social, and cultural.

The role of services and local authorities in facilitating and supporting the articulated and complex process of obtaining a home is also crucial when the housing option turns to public housing. As a fourth topic discussed in the interviews and workshop, we focused on the availability of public housing and how the presence of ICT can have an added value. What emerged from the interviews is that very often this option is privileged by migrant families in the belief that it may be a more practical and accessible solution, but this is not always the case. Indeed, in Bologna, we are witnessing major transformations in the access of public housing and criteria to be eligible for a public house (Bergamaschi, Maggio, 2019; Comune di Bologna, 2021).

Many people are attracted to public housing, then you gain a lot of points with housing transition. [...] Public housing is one resource among many, you keep all possibilities open. The family will have to be guided in making the most suitable housing choice. (int #3, social service)

In addition, the access procedures-while highly digitized - turn out to be a tangled process that migrants face individually. The risk of getting lost in these steps is quite high, necessitating support from services that, as anticipated, does little to help migrants to achieve autonomy.

Today there is ACER<sup>5</sup> but it does not work... for several years we have managed the collection of public housing applications, if in the years of the crisis in Bologna (6000/7000 evictions, 15/20 thousand people on the street) to right the system was also thanks to the activities of the associations. The home office of the

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<sup>5</sup> Acer is a public economic entity with legal personality and organizational, patrimonial, and accounting autonomy, and its activities are governed by regional law and the Civil Code. Its activities include: the management of real estate assets, including public housing (erp) housing, and the maintenance, rehabilitation, and qualification of properties, including the verification of compliance with contractual rules and regulations for the use of housing and common parts. More information at: [www.acerbologna.it/](http://www.acerbologna.it/).

municipality has closed the doors and were sent to the unions. Sometimes that turned into abusive occupations that have solved the problem. (int #1 PA)

Although there is great awareness that enriching and multiplying ICT tools does not automatically contribute to increased accessibility, the support of technology can be directed toward the acquisition and enhancement of digital capabilities for migrants. Some of the suggestion gain through the involvement of local authorities and migrants refer to the creation of guided online tutorial or activation of communication tools with dedicated service or offices to support the migrants to complete the procedures. In the design of the digital solutions, strong consideration was given to the issue of the digital divide, understood as the ability of migrants to physically access digital devices and the Internet line, and digital literacy, meaning the skill set needed to navigate and search for useful information to obtain housing. Clearly when we talk about digital support those are fundamental variable in the impact of new technologies in the housing market and their contribution in facilitating vulnerable populations. Regarding this aspect, many of the solicitations gathered during the interlocution with the research stakeholders later became part of the digital solution produced within the MICADO project, which includes a dedicated section for supporting the required procedures (divided step by step) to apply to the social housing graduations.

## **Conclusions**

The research findings shared in this article are the product of an analytical activity that, starting from the MICADO project, moved toward a specific reflection on the issue of housing and the potential of ICT tools in supporting the migrant population to interact with this area of the integration process. The conclusions that can be drawn relate to two levels. One more inherent to the role of digital and the availability of data so as to map existing housing availability and to make market dynamics (housing offer and request) understandable and accessible to the migrant population, which, as discussed earlier, suffers greater dynamics of exclusion and faces many obstacles that contribute to making them vulnerable and in need of support from the local authority or social services. In this scenario, the need to ensure equitable and understandable access to data and ensure up-to-date and comprehensive databases becomes a strategic issue. However, considering the multiplicity of actors involved (private landlords, public housing authorities, local authorities, social services) this goal seems very ambitious to achieve and it is

necessary to work in a synergistic perspective. In this regard, and this is where the reflection comes to another level (more macro and strategic) during the research work it became clear how digital solutions could be part of the wider solution, but they need to be integrated with policies and with the implementation of structural and political initiatives to address both private and public housing issue. The responsibility of local authorities and agencies involved in the integration of migrants cannot therefore be considered concluded with the enhancement or updating of ICTs for housing search, but they must know how to combine the potential of these tools with political choices capable of intervening in critical situations where these digital aids do not arrive or are insufficient. Only in this way will be possible to address the long-standing housing problem in a concrete and effective way, with the goal of ensuring decent, affordable, and stable housing for those who still remain structurally excluded from current market logics.

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