

**Refugee Women's perspectives on the physical and psychological impact of  
social housing attainment on their wellbeing: A Reading town Case Study**

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This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. I certify that the intellectual content of this dissertation is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this dissertation and sources have been acknowledged.

## **Abstract**

The arrival of over 1 million refugees in Europe in 2015 has demanded great efforts from European authorities in attempts to process applications alongside housing and integrating refugees. While the number of new refugee arrivals in Europe is decreasing, many European countries, including the United Kingdom, are still attempting to shape their approach towards integrating refugees. This includes shaping the housing attainment process, and access to employment and education. Bonewi and Shreeves (2016) note that from January 2016 onwards, 60% of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants reaching the EU were women and children. Refugee women are found to be an underrepresented group of society, with their perspectives often overlooked. By performing a literature review of the current knowledge surrounding refugees and social housing attainment as well as interviews with 4 refugee women in Reading, the process of accessing social housing is found to negatively impact the mental and physical wellbeing of female refugees. To improve the present situation, current policies must develop a more inclusive approach which gives more consideration to the needs of female refugees.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Research Introduction and Aims**

This research seeks to gain a greater understanding of how the wellbeing of female refugees and asylum seekers in the UK is impacted by the process of attaining social housing and by subsequent living conditions. By analysing current UK policies and measures for refugee attainment of social housing, this research focuses on the experiences of refugee women in the Reading area throughout their long-term housing journey in the UK. One of the principal objectives is to draw recommendations which may enhance the physical and psychological impact of attaining social housing on the wellbeing of female refugees. The focus on female refugees stems from a desire to draw attention to a significantly marginalised group whose perspectives and experiences are rarely shared, even in comparison to their male counterparts. In this study, the viewpoints of refugee women are the main focal point.

Due to the relationship between seeking asylum and being granted refugee status, this research references the experiences of asylum seekers whose request for sanctuary is yet to be concluded. Having personally volunteered at the Reading Refugee Support Group since 2015, I have encountered many of the issues facing refugees in the United Kingdom as relates to integration and accessibility of support. One of the most notable impacts I have witnessed is the impact of bureaucracy and stifled aid to the psychological and physical wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers. The other key driver for this research is the vulnerable condition refugee women find themselves in due to their gender and due to the lack of proactive support for female refugees.

Following a literature review of the relevant bodies of knowledge, the interviews and findings are presented and analysed. The findings are then discussed with relevance to the information collected in the literature view, followed by the researcher's recommendations.

### **1.2 Research Methodology and Philosophy**

The research is based on both secondary and primary research. First, secondary information was collected from journals, books, reports by organisations and credible websites and is used to provide a base for the study. Second, primary data was collected via interviews with refugee women describing their personal experiences with attaining social housing in Reading, Berkshire. Naoum (2012) suggests that the interpersonal nature of interviews allows the researcher to extract useful information. This research is conducted with semi-structured interviews which allows the participants freedom to express their thoughts while maintaining predetermined questions and topics across all interviews. In addition, in order to gain a richer account of experiences, a drawing exercise is incorporated into the research question. Visual methods have become increasingly popular in qualitative research. Boden, Larkin and Iyer (2019, p.219) suggest that incorporating drawing exercises into research interviews can provide access into otherwise "hard-to-share" aspects of personal experiences, particularly among participants with disrupted relational networks. This method of research was chosen due to the difficulty of sharing personal information relating to claiming asylum, refuge and social housing.

This research method was selected based on the research topic and the objectives of the research. Of the four main philosophical worldviews -positivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatism the transformative worldview was selected.

The transformative worldview arose from a desire to represent marginalised individuals who do not fit into positivist or pragmatic assumptions. It is derived from bodies of work by critical theorists including Marxists, Feminists and participatory action researchers. Mertens (2010) argues that this philosophy is intertwined with politics and agendas for social change. Issues which relate to empowerment, inequality and oppression are often addressed and recommendations for change are the usual outcome. Creswell (2014) suggests that research conducted under this worldview must not further marginalise the participants as a result. This worldview allows for the integration of theoretical perspectives to inform the proposed changes. Of the four main worldviews, it is most suited for this research as it places central importance on the experiences of traditionally marginalised groups as well as allowing for a critical exploration of power relationships.

To achieve the aims of the study, qualitative data will be collected. Creswell (2003) suggests that this ensures greater insight into personal experiences. While a mixed-method approach of both questionnaires and interviews would be suitable for this research, the minimal size of the research output eliminated the validity of this approach as the data would not be sufficiently analysed. This provides a potential for future research to conduct a mixed-method approach on this topic to gain a greater understanding of the wider demographic.

## **2. Research Context and Literature Review: Refugees, their Housing Pathway in the UK and the Impact of Housing on Wellbeing**

### **2.1 Refugees Worldwide**

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and based on Article 1 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted [...], or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 1951, p.140).

Much of the theoretical and factual debate surrounding housing attainment and experiences for refugees and asylum seekers neglect the experiences of women. Pittaway and Bartolomei (2001, p.25) point to a phenomenon of “gender blindness” that exists in both international law and domestic policies. Academically, the perspective of refugee women is discussed in anthropology and health sciences with an emphasis on the psychological impact of trauma and violence experienced. The discussion is relatively new, with Martin’s (1992) book ‘Refugee Women’ - which discusses the experiences of 50 refugee women from different backgrounds - being seen as the first academic effort in raising awareness to the distinctive issues faced by displaced women.

Since 2015, Europe has been experiencing the largest influx of refugees and asylum seekers of this century. Frequently labelled the ‘refugee crisis’, these past few years have proven to

be a humanitarian emergency. Among the current figure of 25.9 million refugees and 3.5 million asylum seekers worldwide (UNHCR, 2019) 80% are hosted in nearby developing countries, with Germany as the only major developed economy and European country on the world's top 10 refugee host countries list per number of refugees, with no developed countries on the top 10 list of refugee host countries per 1000 inhabitant (Figure 1).

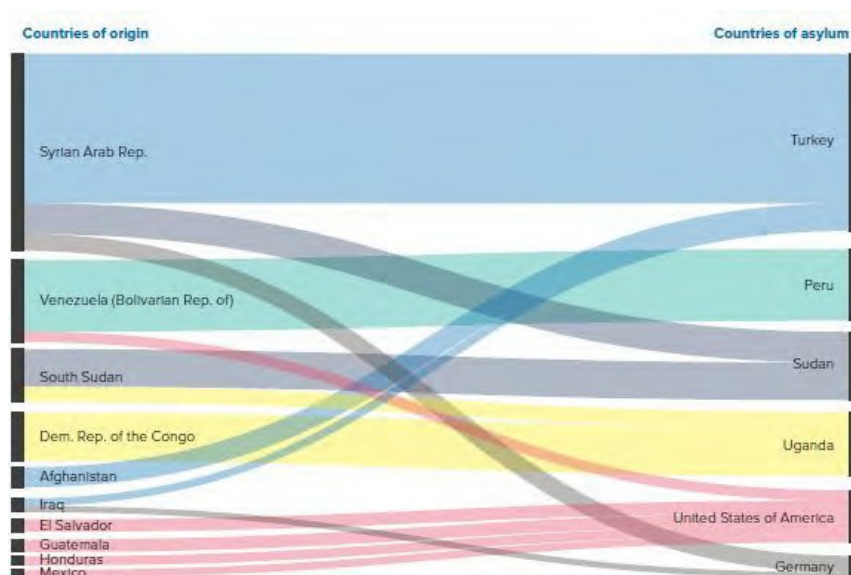


Figure 1 (UNHCR, 2019)

## 2.2 The Experiences of Refugee Women in the European Union (EU)

According to Refugee Council (2019), women are a significantly overlooked group within refugees and asylum seekers in the EU, who “find the asylum system can feel very hostile” thereby reducing their ability to share their personal experiences and to provide a convincing case for asylum. Amnesty International’s (2016) report of women refugees in the EU and a joint report by UNHCR, UN Population Fund and the Women’s Refugee Commission (Eapen et al., 2015) suggest that during their journeys, refugee women are the most exposed to multiple forms of violence from smugglers, criminals and male refugees as well as policemen and camp guards. This includes the journeys from their countries of origin and their journeys within the EU. Issues in detention camps and reception centres are numerous for women and include a lack of privacy, safety and an inability to relocate if a violent or sexual assault has taken place. In a case study surrounding the reception of female refugees and asylum seekers in Munich and Brussels, Bonewi and Shreeves (2016) criticise EU member states’ inability to adapt their reception practices to avoid “substandard living conditions and destitution” for the large number of vulnerable persons seeking asylum in the EU.

Cole, Espin and Rothblum (1992) argue that the lack of female representation and discrimination against women in the process of seeking refuge has a significant impact on the mental health of refugee women. Although only one-third of protection seekers in Europe are women (United Nations Women, 2017), women experience more unique and exceptional

journeys, and they struggle to find compassion and understanding if their narratives are not shared across various platforms (Martin, 1992). The lack of emphasis on the experiences of women appears to contribute to the overall marginalisation of this group.

### **2.3 The Current Context of Social Housing in the UK**

Government interest in building and developing social housing has decreased significantly over the past 40 years (Adam, Chandler, Hood and Joyce., 2015). The most visible cause for this reduction was the implementation of Right to Buy legislation in the 1980 Housing Act under Margaret Thatcher. There is evidence to suggest that the impact of this legislation continues to this day; the Office for National Statistics (2018) indicates a decrease in nearly 190,000 available social houses to rent in England between the years 2001 to 2017. Housing associations are seen to be replacing local authority social housing, having built 26% of new homes in 2016 (National Housing Federation, 2017), however, the combined total of social housing and housing associations is continuously dropping and now accounts for 17% of the total housing market stock (in comparison to over 35% in 1976). Existing schemes, such as Right to Buy and Help to Buy decrease the number of social housing tenants, however, they do not offer comprehensive solutions for the numerous persons on UK council housing waiting lists. The charity, Shelter, suggests that the UK must build 3 million social houses for renting and purchasing over the next 20 years to avoid a housing crisis (Shelter, 2019). Bone and O'Reilly argue that a regeneration of the social housing building sector could offer both a progressive alternative to the expansion of private renting and increase employment opportunities within the built environment.

### **2.4 Social Housing and Wellbeing**

The issues related to social housing go beyond attainability. In a data analysis study of 5500 households in the United Kingdom, consisting of 10,000 participants, Hopton and Hunt (1996) report a strong relationship between housing conditions and mental as well as physical health. Health concerns due to poor living conditions and antisocial behaviour are deep-rooted issues strongly associated with social housing. Koch (2018, p.222) highlights the issue of local housing authorities adopting a “policy of lawfare” in reacting to the issues which face tenants in social housing as opposed to developing a wellbeing approach. Wellbeing refers to both physical and psychological health which local authorities seek to constantly promote and ensure. However, cuts in local authority budgets have meant that maintaining optimal conditions for health has become nearly impossible. For example, Boomsma, Pahl, Jones and Fuertes (2017) highlight the issue of fuel poverty in social housing which negatively impacts the health of residents.

The UK Government Green Paper “A new deal for social housing” (Social Housing Team, 2018) suggests that there is a desire within government to improve the social housing stock, both in terms of quality and availability. Bone and O'Reilly (2010, p.250) argue that there is also some purpose behind maintaining levels of polarisation both economically, within a

consumer-led society and socially, to maintain a 'feel-good factor' among private homeowners. A critical interpretation of this housing phenomenon may derive findings from the theoretical work of Foucault (1991). While Foucault's main findings from Panopticon focused on the idea of surveillance and monitoring, the theory maintains that architecture can be used to exude control. It could be argued that the issue of ineffective housing attainment pathways and sub-standard conditions in social housing remain unresolved in an effort to discourage future claimants.

There is also a growing shift seen within the Green Paper (Social Housing Team, 2018) towards young couples seeking to reach the housing ladder as the focus for social housing, as opposed to more vulnerable members of society. This is explicitly highlighted in a speech by previous Prime Minister, Cameron (2012) wherein he states: "why does a single mother get the council housing straightaway when the hard-working couple have been waiting years?" This distortion of the realities of accessing social housing and the implication that single mothers are not "hardworking" is seen by Flint and Crawford (2015) as part of a greater cynical ideology which reconstructs notions of fairness in the housing system. However, this approach disregards the psychological and social implications of distancing vulnerable persons from the redeveloping ideology of social housing.

## **2.5 Refugees and Social Housing Procedures in the UK**

There is a distinction in the processing of refugees who are brought to the UK via official refugee resettlement programmes, such as the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme, Gateway Protection Programme<sup>1</sup>, and the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme<sup>2</sup>. Due to the UK's geographic position, the majority of refugees have arrived via these government routes. They would have been selected by the UNHCR as exceptionally vulnerable cases and recommended to the UK (Hough, 2018). The cost of a resettled refugee's first year is fully funded by Central Government using the overseas aid budget (Home Office, 2018). Refugees are then allocated to local authorities, and the government aims to ensure "an equitable distribution of refugees across the country so that no individual local authority bears a disproportionate share of the responsibility" (Home Office, 2017, p.5). However, local authority participation is entirely voluntary, therefore, proportionate distribution is difficult to achieve (Figure 2).

Alternatively, clandestine arrivals are held in police custody until their reason for illegal entry is justified. The UK government aims to transport clandestine arrivals to intake units within 72 hours of their entry to the UK. The common procedure is that a clandestine asylum seeker would then be held in a National Asylum Allocations Unit -unless they have other temporary accommodation- while their claim for asylum is thoroughly investigated. Once they are granted refugee status, their accommodation is referred to local authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gateway-protection-programme>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syrian-vulnerable-person-resettlement-programme-fact-sheet>



### Local authorities ranked by refugees resettled per 10,000 population

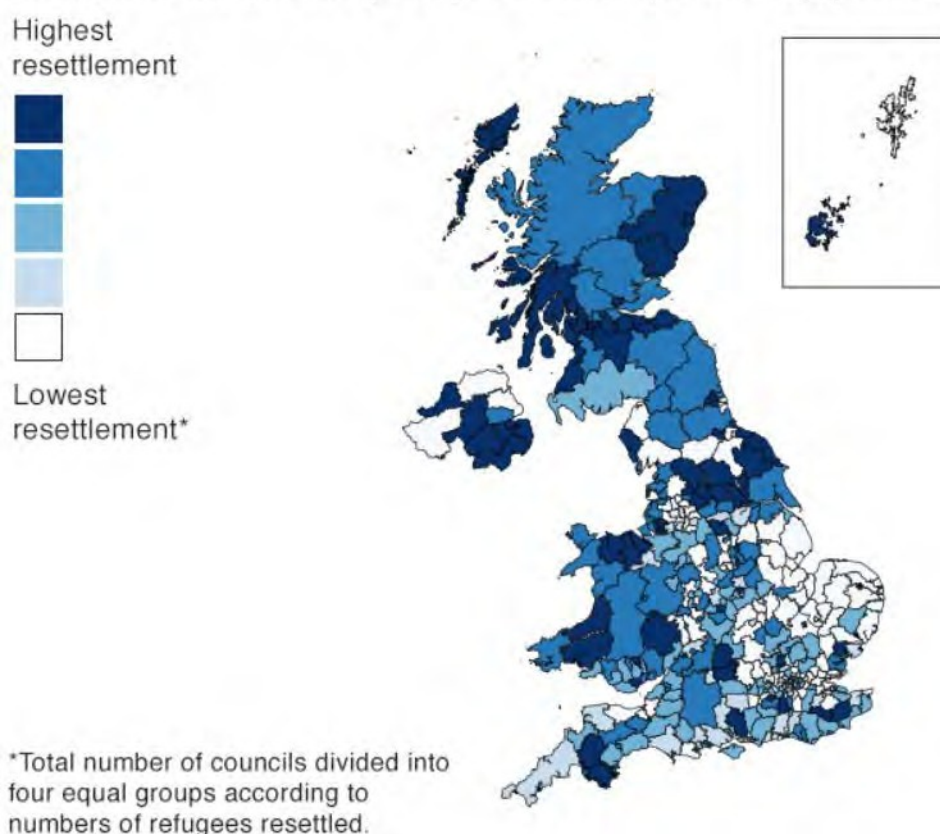


Figure 2 (Home Office, 2018)

The needs of some categories of social tenants often remain, overlooked. This includes persons seeking asylum and persons with refugee status in the UK. In the UK, the Home Office does not provide accommodation for refugees, nor is the local council obligated to house refugees (Citizens Advice, 2019a), however, refugees can apply for social housing if they cannot afford to pay for housing themselves. Given that refugees often flee their countries and face dangerous and expensive journeys to reach the UK, and given that asylum seekers are not given the right to work with a basic salary of £37.75 per week (Citizens Advice, 2019a) it is often unlikely that once granted refugee status, a refugee can afford private tenancy. Refugees who are able to seek private rented accommodation are also often required to provide a guarantor, pay a deposit and deliver advanced rent payment as they cannot prove a credible credit history in the UK. This eliminates the option for private tenancy for many refugees. It is likely that once granted refugee status, a refugee would need to apply for benefits and social housing until they can find suitable employment. Asylum seekers in the UK face a challenging route to housing<sup>3</sup> (Figure 3)

<sup>3</sup> Information from Citizen Advice (2019a) indicates that if an asylum seeker is provided housing before being granted refugee status, they must vacate the house within 28 days of receiving their new status. Refugees who live with friends and family who claim benefits would reduce the amount of housing benefits their friends or family receive. A refugee's housing application is made through the council and refugees are not prioritised on this list but treated as other applicants with priority being given to those who are homeless, fleeing violence, those with health problems or disabilities and those who live in overcrowded or dilapidated housing conditions



Martin, Moore and Schindler (2015) argue that inequality in architecture carries several forms. It is not limited to the lack of available space or amenities but carries further implications into affordability and attainability. In research looking into the living conditions of 117 Freedom from Torture treatment clients, Pettitt (2013) found significant issues in the accommodation provided for torture survivors. As torture survivors follow the same process of asylum-seeking as refugees, these findings can be applied to refugees in the UK. The majority of psychological and physical distress occurred during the asylum-seeking stage due to shared accommodation and subsequent exposure to violence and abuse, as well as a lack of privacy. Pest infestation, issues with dampness, unlockable doors and the lack of fire alarms were the main cause of physical distress for asylum seekers in 'hard to let' social housing (Boomsma, Pahl, Jones and Fuertes, 2017).

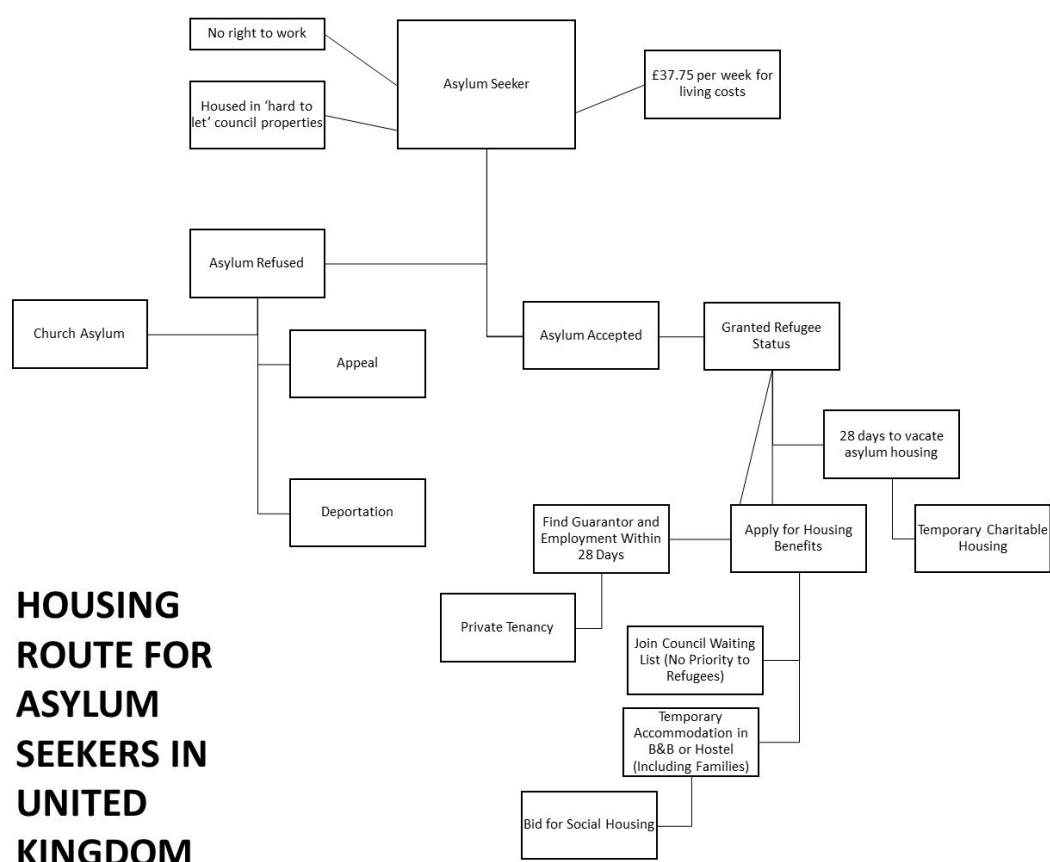


Figure 3, (Author, 2019)

The cost of housing refugees and persons seeking asylum in temporary accommodation is greater than the cost of building new social housing, which is often a significant motivator for local authorities choosing to build new social housing (Shelter, 2019). Other alternatives include charitable, independent initiatives such as Room for Refugees<sup>4</sup> and Refugees at

(Citizens Advice, 2019b). Consequently, refugees are often indefinitely placed in Bed and Breakfasts or Hostels, until they become a priority on the housing list.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.roomforrefugees.com/>

Home<sup>5</sup> who connect refugees and asylum seekers in need of accommodation with people who have spare rooms in their homes. This solution is often temporary and is provided to refugees and asylum seekers who have become homeless in their route to attaining housing. Several services operating in the UK attempt to improve the situation for refugees, offering legal and housing advice alongside emotional support. Many of these services are linked by the umbrella organisation City of Sanctuary<sup>6</sup>. In Reading, the Reading Refugee Support Group (RRSG, 2020) has been “helping refugees and asylum seekers to rebuild their lives in Berkshire since 1994” by offering advice services with caseworkers accredited by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner as well as education services and drop-in sessions.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

Refugees remain one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The ‘Refugee Crisis’ has challenged many European countries who had, hitherto, been unaccustomed to processing such large numbers of both clandestine and official refugees. Although substantial efforts have been made to provide safe refuge, there are still several issues with housing attainment for refugees and asylum seekers. In the UK, the social housing stock struggles to comfortably accommodate new arrivals and it is further restricted by complicated attainment routes. The experiences of female refugees are often marginalised in the discourse. Although they are frequently identified as the most vulnerable group throughout the entire process of seeking refuge international law, governments and local authorities often fail to consider their specific needs. The literature suggests that greater consideration of the wellbeing impact incurred during the housing attainment process could be greatly beneficial for the wellbeing of female refugees and aid their process of integration.

## **3. Findings and Analysis: Experiences of Refugee Women in Reading**

### **3.1 Interview Methods**

The interviews were conducted with women who are clients of the RRSG. All participants had already applied for refugee status and have a leave to remain, allowing them to apply for social housing. Of the 30 clients who attend RRSG meetings weekly, 10 were female, and 7 have already had their request for asylum accepted. All 10 women were approached with no regard to age, country of origin, or method of arrival to the UK to ensure a variety of female perspectives and experiences in the findings. Of the 10 women approached for an interview, 4 agreed to participate. Reasons for refusal included language barriers and difficulty in communication. Despite being assured that their anonymity would be maintained, that they would not be asked to disclose information on their method of arrival to the UK, and that the purpose of the research was purely academic, the majority of refusals to participate came from fears of the interview having a negative impact on their residency. None of the women willing to be interviewed were single women without children.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.refugeesathome.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

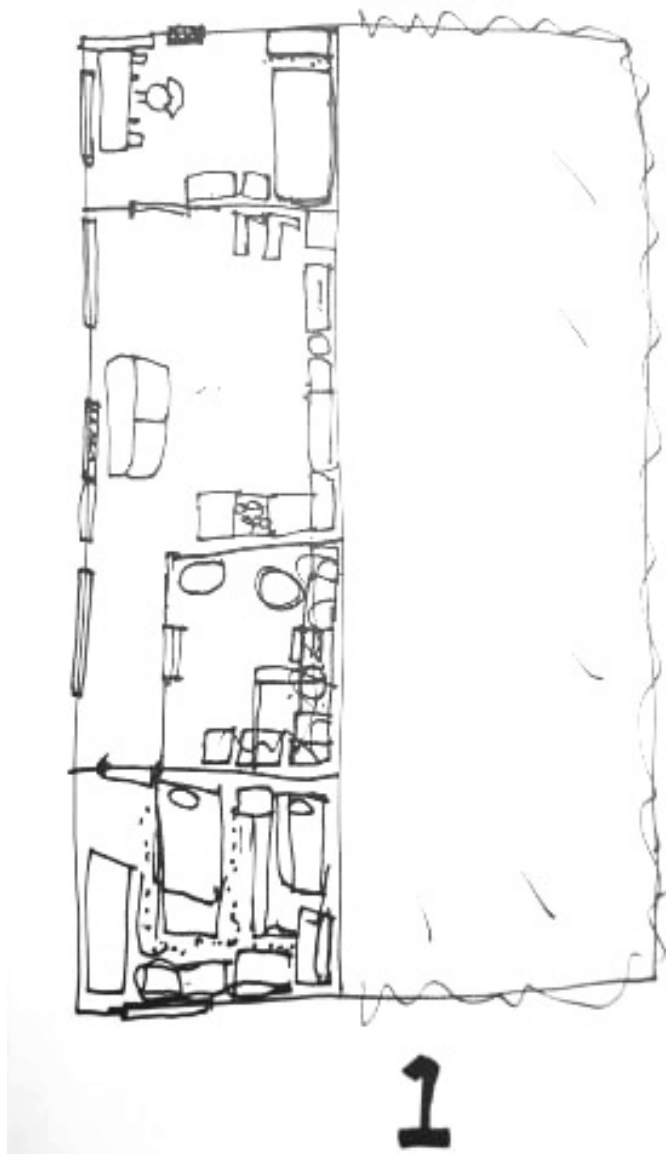
1-to-1 interviews were conducted with 4 female clients of the RRSg. For the interest of privacy, they will be given random letters as pseudonyms.

Respondent	Age	Marital Status	No. of children under 18	Housing Type	Position in attainment process
P	35	Separated	2	Temporary 2 bed flat. New Build	Currently bidding
S	24	Separated	1	Large 2 bed flat. New Build	Successfully bid and housed. Permanent
R	27	Married	2	Large 3 bed detached house with garden	Successfully bid and housed. Permanent
M <sup>7</sup>	42	Widowed	1	Temporary housing (Bed and Breakfast)	Unable to apply

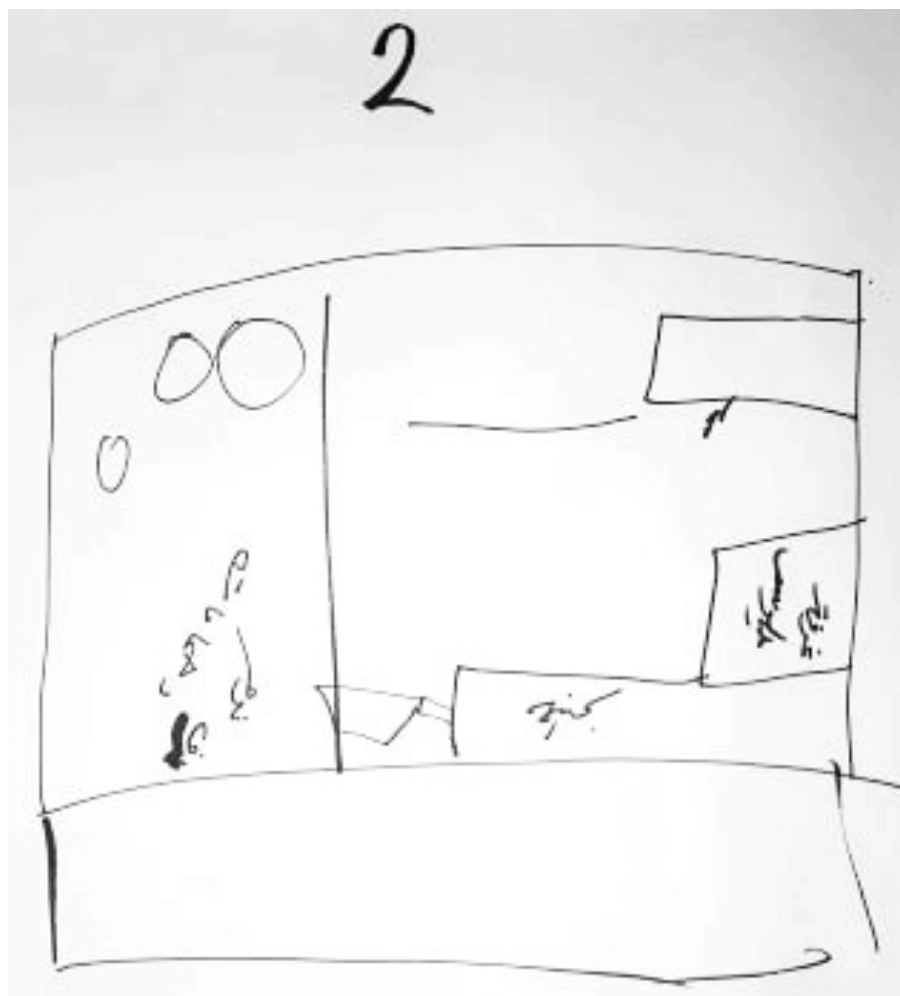
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<sup>7</sup> M is an anomalous respondent. She was unable to complete the interview due to emotional distress in recalling her housing journey. M is a single mother with one child who still lives in their country of origin. She has been housed in bed and breakfasts and hostels since her arrivals and is being denied access to housing and to family reunion until she provides further information on trafficking from her country of origin and her route to the UK. M believes her maternal attachment is being exploited for the purpose of gathering information.

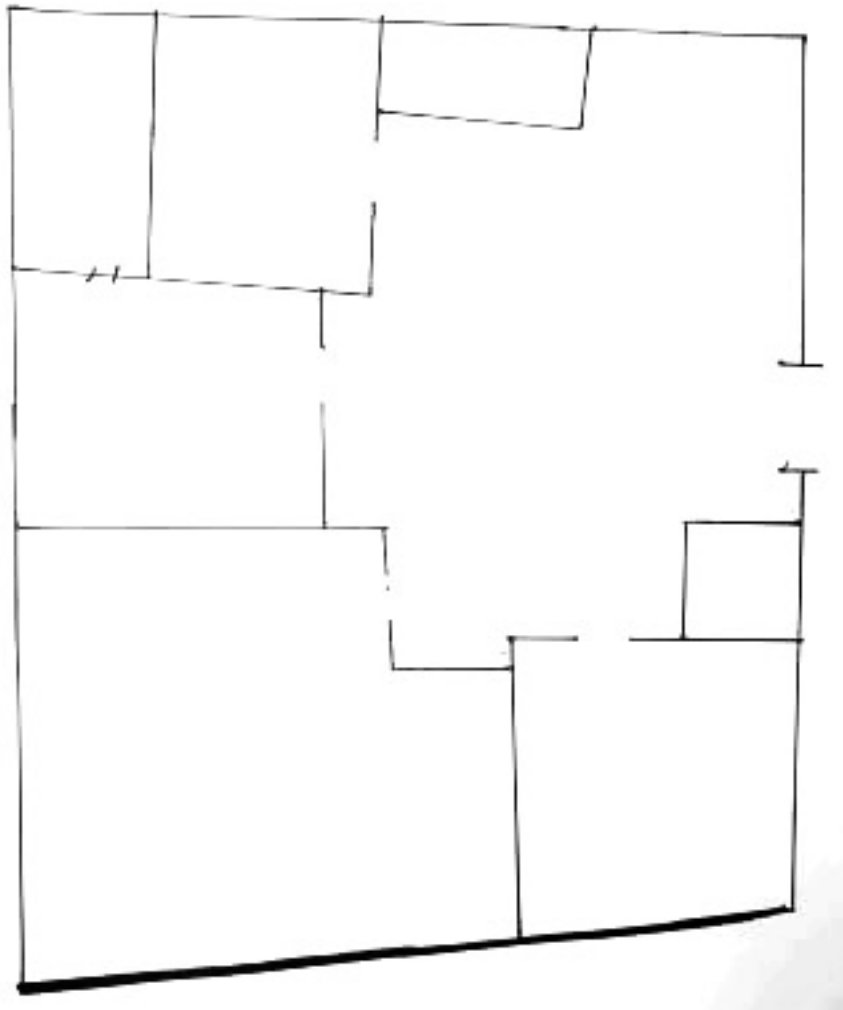
### 3.2 Drawings



This drawing was produced by respondent P. It draws attention to her feeling that her living situation is particularly crowded. None of the respondents were given specific guidance when asked to draw their current accommodation, therefore, it is particularly relevant that P was the only respondent who chose to illustrate furniture and windows. P shares the bedroom to the south with her youngest daughter, having experienced numerous health concerns after sleeping on a sofa in the living room for 6 months. She allows her eldest daughter her own room as her daughter struggles the most with her mental health issues. In the drawing, P drew circulation routes only in her shared bedroom which indicate that she feels unable to move freely in that space and that it is this feeling of being restricted which potentially frustrates her the most.



Respondent R's approach to the drawing was passive. The drawing was completed in under 2 minutes with annotations in Arabic. This further indicates R's disinclination to sharing personal information. This is somewhat surprising as R was the only respondent with positive feedback surrounding the housing attainment process for refugees. R did not arrive in the UK through a government programme; however, she also did not elaborate on how her family became a priority on the housing list. This can be expected due to the sensitive nature of the topic. At the end of the drawing exercise, she was asked "happy with that?" to conclude the exercise, which she interpreted as a question on how she feels about the house. R responded by stating that she and her family were very happy in their new home, particularly with the large garden and that she and her husband plan to purchase the home under right-to-buy after 10 years and that they plan to pass it on to their children in the future.



Participant S was the only participant who requested to use a ruler which can indicate a lack of emotional attachment to her home. The size of the drawing suggests that she feels that the space is large and unrestrictive, yet, the sharp lines suggest she feels the space is also frigid and unwelcoming. S indicated a desire to live in a house with access to an outdoor area and a more “homely” feel. However, her approach to the drawing exercise was positive and amiable which suggests she feels a certain measure of relief at being in a permanent home which she finds generally pleasant. When completing the drawing, S became more comfortable and explained that she had shared a temporary home with her husband for 7 months and was pregnant when she was thrown out of her home by her husband, which caused her to become homeless. This made her a priority on the housing list and she was housed in this permanent flat immediately. She believes her husband had done this in order to ensure that she is able to attain a permanent home for herself and their child before the child was born.

### **3.3 Mental Wellbeing**

All interviewees identified stress as a major psychological issue caused by the process of attaining social housing. Stress was seen to be linked to instability and the temporary nature of the accommodation. The interview with respondent P was most revealing in terms of exposing issues of mental wellbeing related to refugees attaining social housing in the UK. P and her eldest daughter both struggle from mental health issues which resulted from their previous trauma. P reported suffering from flashbacks to traumatic experiences which were caused by staying in visually similar dishevelled housing during the housing allocation process.

Temporary accommodation in hostels and bed and breakfasts was found to cause the most psychological distress due to the lack of privacy and feeling of safety. Single mothers reported a fear of being unable to protect their children in shared accommodation from other residents. Substance abuse and alcohol abuse by other residents were reported as the most distressing factors in shared accommodation. The only positive experience was reported by R whose husband had applied for housing on behalf of the family. R also reported a consideration in the housing attainment process for her small children in that they were not housed in hostels or bed and breakfasts.

Some respondents reported financial issues caused by the housing attainment process impacting their mental wellbeing. This included frequently purchasing new furniture to adapt to new housing environments and the cost of travel caused by disrupted living – including the cost of travelling to viewing during the bidding process and the increased price of commuting caused by travelling greater distances to schools and other commitments following a location change.

### **3.4 Physical Wellbeing**

The instability of housing and the temporary nature of accommodation also arose as an issue for physical wellbeing. Most respondents reported issues of exhaustion caused by frequent relocation. Respondents with children reported health issues associated with adapting their daily routines in order to drop their children off at school, however, this was seen as a minor physical issue by the respondents which they are able to adapt to. Physical wellbeing was seen to be impacted by cramped living conditions by most participants. This included sleeping in the living room and sharing rooms with younger children throughout the housing attainment process.

### **3.5 Recommendations for Change**

P suggests that the bidding process for housing is too strict and must become more lenient or, at least, consider the needs of those with special requirements. Due to their mental health struggle, she is unable to select a house which she believes would deteriorate her daughter's health condition. She reports distress caused by the limit of only viewing three houses which she finds very restrictive. S, who reported the most physical distress caused by relocating among participants, suggested that further efforts are made to locate suitable housing for applicants. She suggests that physical wellbeing may improve if people were able to stay



longer in temporary accommodation if they choose to. R reported no desire to make any changes to the housing process. She felt the attainment process was fair and adequate.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

The findings of these interviews cannot be seen as representative of the entire population of refugee women. However, the findings of the literature review suggest that many experiences are generally shared among refugee women and their recommendations could be applied. The drawing technique – which relates back to the ethnographic techniques of Boden, Larkin and Iyer (2019)- provided greater insight into the physical and psychological experiences of refugee women. It also proved beneficial in allowing the respondents time to become comfortable with discussing sensitive issues related to resettlement and to accessing social housing. This was particularly valuable for the purpose of this study as the majority of respondents came from traditional communities which are accustomed to privacy.

## **4. Discussion**

The majority of respondents reported negative experiences with attaining social housing. This result is confirmed by the suggestions made in the “new deal for social housing” Green Paper (Social Housing Team, 2018) which indicates a need to improve the social housing stock and to provide better access to it.

The findings of this study confirm the Refugee Council’s (2019) suggestion that previous traumatic events experienced by women who seek refuge are often disregarded. Pettitt (2013) provides recommendations for resolving this issue, which is related to the legal processing of survivors of torture’s asylum applications, with little mention of improving future and current social housing stock. Pettitt (2013, p.16) suggests that it is the responsibility of the National Audit Office to “re-examine the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers and provide recommendations on how to achieve a system of contracting in which minimum standards are compiled within practice.” However, this research proposes that there is also a need for local authorities to increase support for female refugees with previous traumatic experiences and for greater consideration of their needs in the attainment of social housing.

Contrary to the implications of the literature review, the majority of respondents reported that they had not faced any issues of discrimination based on gender throughout the housing attainment process. This contradicts Pittaway and Bartolomei (2001, p.24) assertion that refugee women are “actively discriminated against”. However, of the respondents, single mothers reported the highest level of psychological distress caused by the housing attainment process. In line with Crawford and Flint’s (2015) theory of cynical ideology, this implies that while women might not feel that they are being directly discriminated against, there are situations within the housing attainment process which neglect the particular needs and requirements of certain groups of women. Most notably, the findings of this study suggest an urgent need to provide housing environments throughout the attainment process which all women can feel safe in.

The overall impact of attaining social housing on the physical wellbeing of female refugees is found to be a less significant issue than the impact on psychological wellbeing. Few incidents of disrepair were mentioned in the interview, which conflicts with Boomsma, Pahl, Jones and Fuertes's (2017) findings. Yet, it is worth noting that all three respondents are housed in relatively newly built accommodation, therefore, the results on physical wellbeing cannot be generalised. In addition, the study findings which report fatigue and exhaustion caused by constant relocation suggest a deep underlying issue which must be resolved. Remaining in temporary accommodation after receiving refugee status is related to the lack of social housing stock, yet, refugees and asylum seekers often need to feel a sense of stability in their recipient countries in order to successfully integrate and move past their previous traumatic experiences (Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2001). If the needs of this marginalised group are to be considered, then the social housing stock must improve.

## **5. Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of social housing attainment on female refugees. Analysing both theoretical and practical perspectives is important as it provides a clearer understanding of how to improve the procedures of attaining social housing by altering features within the process. In addition, it allows for a critical discussion of the practices that shape the experiences of female refugees.

Choosing women as the main focus of the study and for the collection of qualitative primary data is due to the minimal available discourse on this subject. Female refugees form a majority of refugees worldwide. The variety of their experiences provides an opportunity for a greater understanding of the impact of housing attainment on wellbeing. The discussion, developed from collecting different points of views from refugee women of different cultural backgrounds, is used to develop recommendations for improvements.

The main objectives of the research were to firstly, identify any apparent issues in the housing attainment process for refugees. Secondly, determine how the mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing of refugee women are impacted by the housing attainment process. Finally, the study aimed to provide recommendations for positive change in the attainment process based on the primary and secondary data collected. The current situation of refugees worldwide was discussed, alongside the reaction of European governments to the refugee crisis -including the UK, in order to provide a base of knowledge for the study. The study focuses on the specific experiences of refugee women in the EU, wherein their marginalisation as a gender group is examined.

The study identifies issues in the proportional distribution of refugees. The housing attainment pathway is critically examined and found to greatly disadvantage refugees and asylum seekers in general, and female refugees in particular, as their unique circumstances are not addressed or considered in the attainment process. Both the literature and the interview findings reveal that inherent issues in attainment processes can negatively impact the mental wellbeing of female refugees. The physical wellbeing of female refugees is found

to be less impacted by the attainment process, however, issues of fatigue and exhaustion are confirmed by the primary data.

The recommendations provided by the respondents, presented alongside a critical discussion of recommendations from the literature, can be used as a starting point for future research utilising a wider sample of respondents. The main recommendations for change include making adjustments to government policies that seek to better consider the needs of refugee women, improving the available social housing stock and providing better standards of accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers. This research is, therefore, relevant for social architects, humanitarian organisations, refugee support groups and policymakers wishing to gain a wider insight into the perspectives of refugees on attainment processes and procedures.

## 6. References

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## **7. Appendix**

### **7.1 Progress Report**

### **7.2 Supervision Log Sheets**

### **7.3 Ethics Form**



# dissertation progress report

provisional title	Experiences and perspectives of refugee women in social housing in Reading
student	Qamar Ayoubi
supervisor	Professor Flora Samuel
date	24/10/2019

## 1 current state of your research

I have maintained an interest in social housing from the dissertation proposal, however, I have decided to focus my research on the experiences of refugee women in accessing social housing. I have developed the following structure for the dissertation:

- Introduction
- Social housing, the situation of waiting lists
- The causes and consequences of the decline in social housing – including health concerns, anti-social behaviour and fuel poverty
- Refugee Housing in the UK: the process of attaining social housing and where refugees belong on the list (This is described through my own diagram)
- Critical questioning of the way in which refugees are housed using a literature review
- Interview findings and discussion
- Recommendations based on research on designing for diversity and interview responses
- Why this research is important
- Recommendations based on precedents + literature review
- Recommendations based on interviews
- Conclusion

The dissertation is currently in the drafting stages, of which approximately 1500 words are currently completed and attached to this file. The attachment also contains an up-to-date list of references.

## 2 proposed reading list

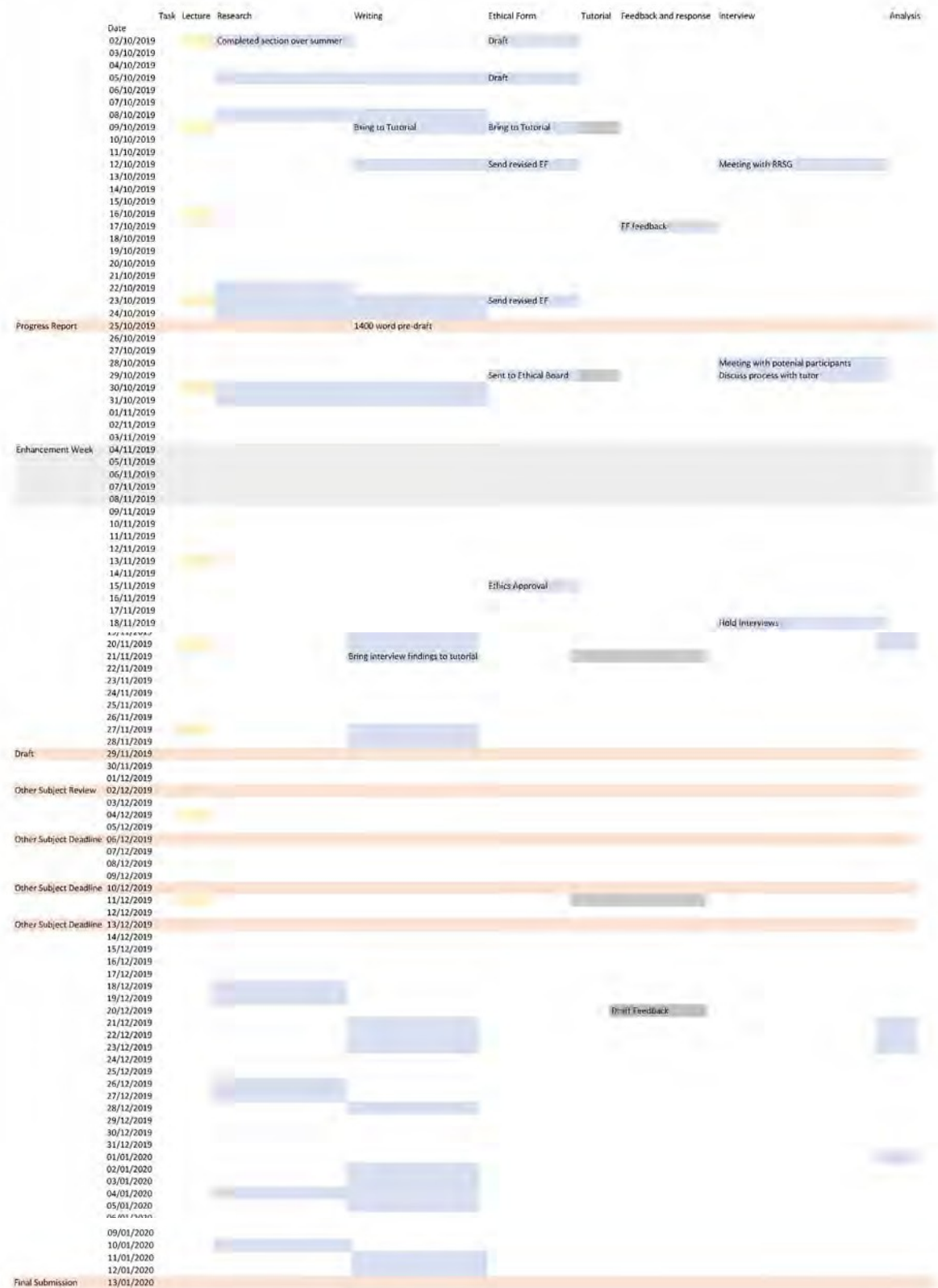
For the purpose of this research, theoretical literature regarding architecture and inequality remains relevant. This includes the work of Foucault (1991)., Martin, Moore and Schindler (2015).

The purpose of the research also requires drawing upon sources of factual information such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Office for National Statistics and other government and corporate reports.

Another relevant theoretical aspect focuses on the health impact (both psychological and physical) of improved housing conditions. This line of research will be used to draw attention to the importance of this line of research and includes the work of Hopton and Hunt (1996)., Bone and O'Reilly (2010) and Boomsma, Pahl, Jones, and Fuertes (2017)

### 3 proposed plan of work

I have developed the following chart indicating the proposed plan for completing this dissertation



#### **4 any issues and / or concerns**

I expect to face one key timetabling issue; my intended participants – clients of the RRSg – meet on Mondays which collides with AA3/DS5. This is only an issue on days where I decide to conduct interviews. I have found it unreasonable to persuade participants to conduct the interviews on a different day as RRSg would need to rent the additional interview space and apply for additional funding to cover the transport costs of their clients (both costs are already covered on Mondays)

Another anticipated issue is caused by the topic of my research as my research question focuses on the experiences of refugee women. Women are often disinclined to share their personal experiences, especially if they found them traumatic or distressing. I need to make a strong effort to gain the trust of the participants in order to be able to conduct the interviews.

# supervision log sheet

It is very important that both you and your supervisor have a clear agreement of the actions and next steps to follow towards a successful completion of your dissertation. You are required to use this template to track all your discussions, notes and feedback received.

Student: Rammar

Supervisor: Flora Samuel

Date: 09 / 10 / 2019

A report/draft was submitted for discussion: Yes ☒ No ☐

Feedback from supervisor

Great start on background text.  
Need definition refugee  
Description of support services generally  
and homing in on the Reading organisation.  
- Great diagram of theory of refugee homing.  
What really happens on ground.  
Homing pathways of: ~~Refugees~~ Women refugees  
perception of...

Next steps

Describe research methods.

- Ethics application
- Consolidating background text

Any other issues discussed

3-5 interviews.  
up to an hour  
recorded  
anonymously.

Discussed emergent ethics. Less question  
- What homing pathway +  
Wellbeing impact  
- What was home like at home +  
Dramatic contrast home  
(with things that make happy  
+ sad)  
- How could refugee homing  
be made better?

signature of supervisor

Flora Samuel

signature of student

Rammar

# supervision log sheet

It is very important that both you and your supervisor have a clear agreement of the actions and next steps to follow towards a successful completion of your dissertation. You are required to use this template to track all your discussions, notes and feedback received.

Student: Qamar

Supervisor: Funn

Date: 29.10.19

A report/draft was submitted for discussion: Yes ☒ No ☐

Feedback from supervisor

- Excellent news that interviewees ~~are~~ are lined up.
- Keep social networking minimal to allow space for the refugee discussion
- Qamar has started writing, really good start.
- Will polish the first half over enhancement week & then send over.

Next steps

Meeting 20 Nov.  
Qamar will send draft after enhancement week.

What goes in intro.

Aim  
Definitions Refugee.  
Why it is important.  
How you did research  
(desktop + interviews)  
Something about your  
viewpoint ~~background~~  
Wellbeing impact  
What the ~~first~~ draft  
Describe structure of diss.

Any other issues discussed

draft structure.

- Intro
- ~~1~~ Literature Review  
(What is known about subject)
- ~~2~~ ~~Research~~ Introduction. <sup>Introductory</sup> ~~part~~
- ~~3~~ How you did interviews & findings.
- Recommendations/Conc

signature of supervisor

Funn Samuel

signature of student

Qamar

# supervision log sheet

It is very important that both you and your supervisor have a clear agreement of the actions and next steps to follow towards a successful completion of your dissertation. You are required to use this template to track all your discussions, notes and feedback received.

Student: *Qamar*

Supervisor: *Finn*

Date: *20.11.19*

A report/draft was submitted for discussion: Yes ☒ No ☐

Feedback from supervisor

*Qamar has undertaken 4 interviews  
She sent draft - Finn made  
suggestions. Very good progress.*

Next steps

*Methodology (Interviews plus draft  
First intro. the interviewees  
Write up interviews. thematic  
Will do a rough draft for  
29 Nov.*

*Kate  
Pahl*

Any other issues discussed

signature of supervisor

*Finn Samuel*

signature of student

*Qamar*

# Application for Approval of Research Ethics

**Researcher / Student:** complete and email to your Supervisor/PI

**Supervisor / PI:** check and email to:

**sbe-undergrad@reading.ac.uk** [for BSc research]

**sbe-postgrad@reading.ac.uk** [for MSc and MArch research]

**sbeexecsupport@reading.ac.uk** [for PhD, EngD and Staff research]



**University of  
Reading**

**School of the Built Environment**

## Section 1 – Project Summary

**Project Title:**

Experiences and perspectives of refugee women in social housing in Reading

**Applicant (Researcher/Student):**

Name: Qamar Ayoubi

Number (Students only): 26004116

Email address: q.ayoubi@student.reading.ac.uk

Status: BSc

**Supervisor / Principal Investigator:**

Name: Professor Flora Samuel

Email address: f.b.samuel@reading.ac.uk

**Is this a Nil Return?** No

**If YES:**

- **Applicant:** Read **Section 4** (confirming the accuracy of your answers) and email it to your Supervisor / PI
- **Supervisor / PI:** Read **Section 4** and check this is a 'Nil Return'. Approve in the box below, then email to:  
sbe-undergrad@reading.ac.uk [for BSc research]  
sbe-postgrad@reading.ac.uk [for MSc and MArch research]  
sbeexecsupport@reading.ac.uk [for PhD, EngD and Staff research]
- NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED

If **NO**, please continue to **Section 2...**

## Further Information

This must be your University email address. Using your university email is sufficient to confirm your identity and means we do not require a signature.

This must be your University email address. Using your university email is sufficient to confirm your identity and means we do not require a signature.

A research project is classified as a 'Nil Return' if it does NOT involve: direct contact with human subjects, human samples, human personal data, special access to company documents/records, questionnaires, surveys or interviews etc. Usually this means research using secondary data that is publically available.

A Nil Return is approved by the Supervisor / PI and is not usually checked by the Research Ethics Committee.

**APPROVAL (to be completed by Supervisor/PI for Nil Return or Simple Survey, otherwise by REC)**

Approved (YES/NO) Yes

Name:

Date:

Comments:



## Section 2 – Research Methods

What is the general subject of your research?

I am investigating how the personal wellbeing of refugees is impacted by their experiences in social housing and by access to the UK social housing system

Will your **ONLY** research method be a simple Questionnaire or Survey?

If YES:

- PRODUCE A ONE PAGE DRAFT OF YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE, USING ATTACHMENT A (after Section 4).
- **Applicant:** Read **Section 4** (confirming the accuracy of your answers), then email this form including **Attachment A**, to your Supervisor / PI
- **Supervisor / PI:** Read **Section 4** and check **Attachment A** is appropriate. Approve in the box above, then email to:  
sbe-undergrad@reading.ac.uk [for BSc research]  
sbe-postgrad@reading.ac.uk [for MSc and MArch research]  
sbeexecsupport@reading.ac.uk [for PhD, EngD and staff research]
- NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED

If **NO**, please give more detail here and complete Section 3...

**Describe your research methods:**

I will hold individual semi-structured interviews for approximately 45 minutes each with 3-5 women with refugee status living in social housing in the Reading area. The participants will each be asked to share their personal reactions and experiences with the social housing system verbally and through drawing. All interviews will be audio recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews will take place in the Reading Refugee Support Centre.

Using 'ATTACHMENTS' (below, after Section 4), include any other information. Usually:

- Information sheet (Example in ATTACHMENT B)
- Consent form (Example in ATTACHMENT C)
- Draft Interview Questions (Use ATTACHMENT D)

## Further Information

This should be a very short summary of a few sentences in everyday language, describing **WHAT** you are investigating (e.g. I am investigating green supply chains and how they impact on cost of construction).

A simple questionnaire or survey, with no significant ethical issues is approved by the Supervisor / PI and is not usually checked by the Research Ethics Committee. If you consider there to be ethical issues at stake, you must describe and consider these by completing the rest of the form.

All Questionnaires or Surveys **MUST** include an opening paragraph clarifying: voluntary participation; confidentiality; anonymity; data management; informed consent. See example in ATTACHMENT A (part of this form, after Section 4).

This should be a summary of **HOW** you intend to investigate your topic. Describe your methods (e.g. interviewing, transcription, observations, recording, photographs etc.) Include details such as: what type of data you will gather, how many participants, how they were chosen, what they will do etc. Use ATTACHMENT D (below, after Section 4) to provide examples of interview questions.

Remember this is about the practical activities you plan – tell us what you are actually going to do. This is **NOT** the place for you to justify your choice of method, describe theoretical underpinnings etc.

Where reasonably possible, you **MUST** provide every person you contact in your research with an Information Sheet, and obtain from them a signed Consent Form. If for **ANY** REASON you are unable to do this, you should contact your Supervisor / PI, and/or the SBE Ethics Committee.

## Section 3 – Ethical Issues

Outline your ethical issues, and how you intend to deal with them:

Participants will be asked to share details of their home life and so confidentiality will be maintained. Participants may be reluctant to share information of their housing situation so their anonymity will be guaranteed and the interviews will take place in a safe and familiar environment (The Reading Refugee Support Center). Some participants may wish to conduct the interview in Arabic. I (the interviewer) speak Arabic as a native language therefore, some interviews will be conducted in Arabic based on participant preference. Arabic copies of the information sheet and consent form will be made available to participants. All interviews will be recorded and the recordings will be made available to my supervisor upon request.

If your research involves any of the following, your application may be raised with the University Research Ethics Committee.

- Medical procedures or samples?
- Patients or clients of the NHS?
- Psychological research using human participants?
- People unable to give informed consent?
- Educational research?
- Food research?
- The use of personal data?
- Participants who are in a 'Special Relationship' with you
- Deception

Does your research involve any of the above?

How will you store your data (including signed Consent Forms)?

on a password protected laptop

How long will you retain your data?

1 year after completion

## Further Information

Issues might include: confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, payment to participants, controversial or sensitive research topics, proprietary technical information, involvement of young or vulnerable people, existing relationships with participants (student, spouse etc.), cultural or language differences, coercion or deception, place of interaction (public place, workplace, hazardous environment etc.), revelation of criminality, uncovering health issues, exposure to pain or distress, physical contact generally, consumption of food or drink, risk to personal safety of the researcher and the participants, inconvenience or intrusion, environmental impact.

**THIS LIST IS BY NO MEANS EXHAUSTIVE - YOU MUST IDENTIFY ALL ISSUES RELEVANT TO YOUR OWN PROJECT AND EXPLAIN HOW YOU WILL DEAL WITH THEM.**

If an application to the University Research Ethics Committee is required, you will be contacted by the SBE Ethics Committee. If you are unsure, please contact the SBE Ethics Committee before submitting your application. People 'unable to give informed consent' are usually children or vulnerable adults. It is a legal requirement that staff and students undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service check before engaging in research when in a position of trust. 'Special Relationship' includes for example: spouse/partner; employer/employee; teacher/student etc.

All data, including signed consent forms, must be stored securely (e.g. on a password protected laptop; in a locked office etc.) All data must be removed from personal storage and returned to SBE (usually to the PI) if/when the researcher leaves SBE.

BSc / MSc dissertation data would usually be destroyed 1 year after completion. PhD / Staff research data should be retained for 3 years post-research by default. Research supported by external funders may have specific requirements (e.g. note RCUK requirements).

## Section 4 – Confirmation

### Applicant:

- To the best of my knowledge I have made known all relevant information to the Research Ethics Committee, and I undertake to conduct this research in line with the information provided. I will inform the committee of any such information that subsequently becomes available, whether before or after the research has begun.
- **To confirm this statement, please email the completed form (including the 'ATTACHMENTS' sections as required) to your Supervisor / PI (from your university email address)**
- NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED

### Supervisor / PI:

- I have checked the content of this form and the attachments, and to the best of my knowledge I have made known all relevant information to the Research Ethics Committee, and I undertake to inform the committee of any such information that subsequently becomes available, whether before or after the research has begun.
- **To confirm this statement, please email the form (from your university email address) to:**  
**sbe-undergrad@reading.ac.uk** [BSc]  
**sbe-postgrad@reading.ac.uk** [MSc and MArch]  
**sbeexecsupport@reading.ac.uk** [PhD, EngD and Staff]
- NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED

## Further Information

It is important that if you have any queries, you discuss with your Supervisor / PI or contact the SBE Ethics Committee before submitting this form.

Using your university email is sufficient to confirm your identity and means we do not require a signature.

Using your university email is sufficient to confirm your identity and means we do not require a signature.

## Attachment A - Draft Questionnaire / Survey

Use this page if you are conducting a questionnaire or survey. Surveys often do not allow for the distribution of information sheets and signed consent forms. To obtain informed consent, researchers should begin the survey with a short paragraph informing participants of the nature and topic of the project and indicating that by completing the survey, they are consenting to participate.

Copy / Paste your Draft text into the box below. You might simply edit the example text already given. Note, THIS IS ONLY AN EXAMPLE, any relevant information must be modified to suit your project, including all that text in italics (right click on text to select/remove italics). Include a representative selection of your draft questions. Do not exceed this one page.

## Attachment B - Draft Information Sheet

Use this page if you are conducting interviews or face-to-face meetings (e.g. observations, focus groups etc.) Each participant should be informed of the purpose and methods of the research, on an Information Sheet. This should be on University of Reading headed paper, and MUST include contact details for the researcher and supervisor / PI. Leave a signed copy of the Information Sheet with the participant.

Copy / Paste your draft text into the box below. You might simply edit the example text already given. Note, THIS IS ONLY AN EXAMPLE, any relevant information must be modified to suit your project, including all that text in italics (right click on text to select/remove italics). Include a representative selection of your draft questions. Do not exceed this one page.



School of the Built Environment  
University of Reading  
Whiteknights Reading  
RG6 6AW

Experiences and perspectives of refugee women in social housing in Reading

My name is Qamar Ayoubi and I am a BSc student in Architecture, from the School of the Built Environment at the University of Reading. I am carrying out research on the impact of social housing on the wellbeing and cultural identity of refugees in the UK.

If you are willing to be interviewed you will be asked to participate in a one-to-one interview of about 45 minutes at a time of your choice in the Reading Refugee Support Center. During the interview I will ask you questions on your experience with accessing social housing and ask you to draw your house for me. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. Copies of the audio recording will be available on request and any changes which you ask for will be made.

You can choose not to answer any questions. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

At every stage, your identity will remain confidential. Your name and all identifying information will be removed from the written transcript. My supervisor and I will be the only people who will have access to this data. The data will be kept securely and destroyed when the study has ended, which will be a maximum of 12 months from the completion of the research. The data will be used for academic purposes only. Copies of any outputs, such as articles or presentation slides, will be available on request.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [wj004116@student.reading.ac.uk](mailto:wj004116@student.reading.ac.uk), or my supervisor at [f.b.samuel@reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.b.samuel@reading.ac.uk)

This project has been subject to ethical review, according to the procedures specified by the University Research Ethics Committee, and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

## Attachment C – Draft Consent Form

Use this page if you are using Information Sheets. If the participant is happy to be part of your research project, they need to confirm this by signing a Consent Form. ALL CONSENT FORMS MUST BE RETAINED ALONGSIDE THE COLLECTED DATA, AND SUBJECT TO THE SAME DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN. Make sure this is the same as you outlined in Section 3.

Copy / Paste your Draft text into the box below. You might simply edit the example text already given. Note, THIS IS ONLY AN EXAMPLE, any relevant information must be modified to suit your project, including all that text in italics (right click on text to select/remove italics). Include a representative selection of your draft questions. Do not exceed this one page.



**University of  
Reading**

School of the Built Environment  
University of Reading  
Whiteknights Reading  
RG6 6AW

Experiences and perspectives of refugee women in social housing in Reading

Participant Consent Form - to be retained by the researcher

1. I have read and had explained to me by Qamar Ayoubi in the Information Sheet relating to this project and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I will be asked questions about my journey to social housing and agree to participate in a drawing exercise
3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, and that this will be without detriment.
4. I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researcher and her supervisor at the University of Reading, unless my explicit consent is given.
5. I understand that I will not be identified either directly or indirectly without my consent.
6. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded and that I any changes I ask for will be made
7. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

Signed:

Date:

## **Attachment D – Any Other Information (including Draft Interview Questions)**

Use this Attachment page to include representative interview questions. Also use this page to include any other information such as leaflets, adverts, recruitment emails etc. This needs to provide enough detail for the Ethics Committee to understand what you are doing and the ethical issues involved.

Copy/paste images or text, or type in, but do not exceed this one page.

Semi structured qualitative section: