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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Migrants' Settlement in Malaysia: Nurturing Sustainable Urban Development through Housing Rights

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Abstract Aspects of adequate housing encompass affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, cultural appropriateness, and accessibility of resources such as services, materials, utilities, and infrastructure. Migrant settlement and housing issues in Malaysia have been a persistent problem for many years. Numerous migrants are compelled to live in cramped and unsafe circumstances due to various factors, including a lack of living space, inadequate government policies, and social stigma. Surprisingly, the housing aspect of integrating regular migrants has received little focus than other integration efforts. Both locals and migrants are impacted by this apathy and vulnerability. Key guiding principles that support the right to a reasonable standard of living, which includes sufficient housing, are found in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Therefore, this article aims to explore the issues and challenges of migrants' settlement in Malaysia's urban area and propose suggestions to reduce the settlement issue among migrants. Correspondingly, this study employed a qualitative methodology that combined a thorough literature review with semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic analysis. The findings show that uncomfortable living conditions for locals and overcrowding are major issues in migrant settlements. Five strategies are suggested to address these issues: creating housing cooperatives and modular dwellings; transforming emergency housing into long-term solutions; and reusing accessible derelict buildings.

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1. Introduction

In Southeast Asia, migrant workers form an integral part of the regional labour force, navigating complex socioeconomic dynamics and policies that shape their experiences and contributions. One of the nations in Southeast Asia with the highest number of migrant labourers worldwide is Indonesia (Pitoyo et al., 2022). The term "migrants" encompasses individuals relocating for diverse reasons within or across borders, including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, and family members. Migration occurs when individuals from diverse origins converge in specific areas, fostering community interaction and cultural exchanges (Jasni et al., 2023). While lacking a specific international law definition, migrants fall into legal categories, including migrant workers. Migrants in Malaysia encompass diverse categories, including refugees and economic migrants, both of whom are prone to inadequate legal protection. However, this article specifically focuses on migrant workers, a diverse group that includes both low- and high-skilled workers. In Malaysia, migrant workers are often employed in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, plantation agriculture, and domestic work, with low-skilled workers being the majority. These workers frequently face heightened vulnerability due to the absence of explicit legal frameworks addressing their rights and protections. This gap often results in the labelling of undocumented migrant workers as "illegal aliens," exposing them to precarious living conditions and significant challenges in securing basic human rights, particularly in the context of housing and settlement.

Urban settlement challenges in Malaysia involve affordable housing, particularly for low-skilled, low-wage migrants, which often leads to subpar living conditions that pose risks to well-being and safety. However, housing and living conditions for migrant workers are often only mentioned incidentally in research and reports, albeit a few notable exceptions. Despite being an important aspect of the migration experience, inadequate housing remains a significant factor contributing to the vulnerability of migrant workers, concerning human and labour rights violations (Sheill, 2022). Despite the fact that housing is generally acknowledged as a crucial pillar of integration for migrations (Ager & Strang, 2008), studies on housing has received little attention (Brown et al., 2024). The availability of adequate and insufficient housing for migrant workers has a significant impact on their overall quality of living, well-being, and other human and labour rights (Setiadi, 2020). Adequate housing is listed as a fundamental human

right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Shannon et al., 2018). Habitability is one of the requirements and housing is deemed insufficient if it does not, among other things, provide safety from "other threats to health" (UN-Habitat, 2003)

Inadequate housing for migrant labourers has long been a defining aspect of the global housing crisis (Open Society Foundations, 2020). Finding adequate and respectable housing for migrant employees can be challenging, and in some cases, it may even amount to exploitation that is frequently ignored (Segrave & Burnett-Wake, 2017). This situation mirrors the emphasis on housing rights and conditions more broadly. Nowhere in the world has the right to adequate housing, which is acknowledged in the founding documents of international labour and human rights law, been completely realised (UN CESCR, 1991). Therefore, housing both predicts and adds to the increase in social disparity (UN Human Rights Council, 2012). According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur, the right to sufficient housing is fundamental to the lived experience. Migrant workers' access to housing is impacted by the laws governing their entry and residency in the country of destination, as well as the standing and pay that is given to their labour. In their search for housing in the country of destination, migrant workers must navigate a new regulatory structure, often in a language they do not speak, as well as the difficulties of not being citizens and having no prior experience of renting in the area. The geographical landscape of migrant localities in Malaysia has undergone a notable transformation over the past two decades, reflecting an intricate tapestry of shifting migration patterns and concentrations. What was once primarily a focal point for migrants from Indonesia and Bangladesh has dynamically evolved into a diverse mosaic of migrant communities hailing from several other Asian nations. These communities have clustered in urban areas, strategically positioning themselves in proximity to their workplaces, thereby reshaping the demographic fabric of these urban centres. Figure 1 displays the locations of the migrants by nation in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Housing is an essential aspect of the integration process because it offers stability, security, and a base from which migrants can engage with their communities, find rewarding employment, and look into educational options. Inadequate housing is a critical issue for migrants in many parts of the world, including in Malaysia where migrants are settling in urban areas. The Open Society Foundation (2020) highlights that this issue has been regarded as a global housing crisis for a long time. International standards provide general principles for the right to adequate housing, including specific guidelines for the housing of migrants. International human rights legislation is centred on the requirement for everyone to have access to adequate living conditions, including housing (OHCHR, 2009). The right to sufficient housing for all is acknowledged in Article 25(1) of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living. The right to an adequate standard of living, which entails housing "and the continuous improvement of living conditions" is also recognised by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of the United Nations (Rica, 2015). Further explaining the right to adequate housing, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has provided the following bare minimum requirements (OHCHR, 2009; IHRB, 2019).

Legal security of tenure involves protecting an individual's right to occupy and use their home or land, safeguarding against forced eviction, arbitrary removal, or displacement.

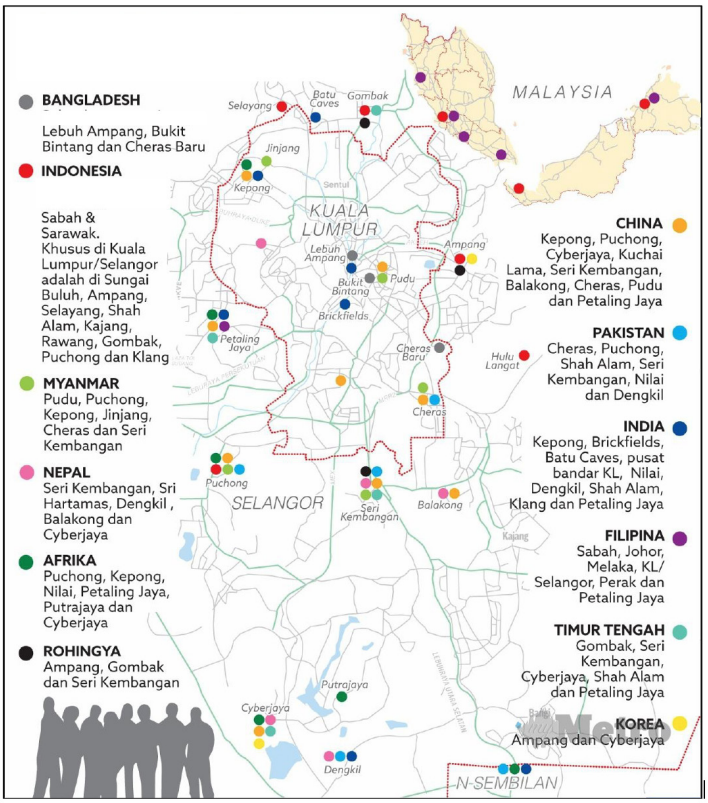


Figure 1. Locality of Migrants in the Klang Valley, Malaysia by Countries
Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2024)

Aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's target 1.4, ensuring equal access to economic resources as well as ownership and control over land is essential. The percentage of adults with secure tenure rights, whether documented or perceived, determines progress (United Nations, 2017). Tenancy security is often precarious for migrant workers who rely on their employers for housing and employment. Their lease must align with the contract (ILO Recommendation No. 115), yet they also have the right, along with their families, to a reasonable period for leaving housing upon employment termination or incapacitation. Security of tenure, as per the UN Human Rights Council (2012), must be legislatively recognised or protected. This entails individuals or households having a legal right to remain in their homes without fear of arbitrary eviction. For migrant workers, ensuring the security of tenure involves a comprehensive approach that integrates legal protections, access to information, monitoring, enforcement, and support for alternative housing. This is crucial for their protection, given their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and discrimination. Additionally, the right to adequate housing encompasses accessibility to services, facilities, and infrastructure (Sheill, 2022). Achieving a good standard of living requires not only adequate housing but also easy access to essential services such as clean water, sanitation, and healthcare, thus, contributing to overall health and well-being. The lack of these necessities may impede the individuals' ability to maintain suitable housing.

Malaysia's rules and regulations governing migrant housing primarily fall under the Employment Act 1955 and the Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Act 1990 (hereafter Act 446), which require the employers to provide suitable accommodations with adequate space, sanitation, and utilities, particularly for workers in industries such as construction and plantations. In Malaysia, over 1.5 million documented migrant workers are present, with 91% living in accommodations that fall short of meeting the country's established minimum housing requirements (Nasir et al., 2023). Employers are obligated to ensure that accommodations, whether dormitories or other facilities are equipped with access to electricity and a reliable water supply. Furthermore, these accommodations must feature secure electrical systems, fire safety measures, and provisions for medical aid. The amendment, approved in 2019, was scheduled to come into effect in June 2020, reinforcing employers' accountability for maintaining proper living conditions for their workers. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and penalties for non-compliance are minimal, leading to widespread substandard housing conditions. Additionally, undocumented migrants lack protection under these regulations, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe living conditions. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, introducing targeted policies for migrant housing, and fostering collaborations between the government, employers, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could address these gaps and improve the living conditions of migrant workers.

All migrant workers, irrespective of their financial status, should have access to affordable and dignified housing to ensure a decent standard of living. Housing affordability is defined by Sohaimi (2022), and Sohaimi, Abdullah, and Shuid (2018) as the ability of a household to meet its overall expenditure needs while maintaining the financial capacity to consistently cover monthly housing costs without undue financial strain. Furthermore, the UN Statistics suggests that affordable rental housing should ideally have a rent-to-income ratio of 25 per cent or less (Mia & Zull, 2020). Sohaimi (2018) emphasises that housing affordability should consider a household's ability to maintain a certain standard of living, and if it fails to do so, it may be deemed unaffordable. This may lead to the classification as being in shelter poverty (Stone, Burke, & Ralston, 2011).

According to the Sphere Association (2018), the right to adequate housing includes the housing location, underscoring the importance of granting migrant workers the freedom to choose their residence (OHCHR, 2009). Housing that is provided or arranged by employers for (migrant) workers is considered a workplace under international labour standards, which is subject to labour law due to its employment association (Ales, 2018). The United Nations emphasises that the right to adequate housing includes both the physical structure and its location, with a focus on accessibility to basic services. The housing location is crucial for the migrants' right to adequate housing, influencing their dignity and well-being. Governments are responsible for ensuring safe, secure, and affordable housing for all, including migrants, regardless of legal status. Ensuring habitability involves assessing factors such as construction quality, materials, protection against harm, and environmental conditions (Sheill, 2022). Habitable housing standards also require access to clean water, sanitation, hygiene facilities, and a suitable environment for food preparation. The criteria also include space allocation per person or family, which emphasises decency and comfort (Sphere Association, 2018).

Therefore, by narrowing its scope to migrant workers, especially low-skilled labourers, this article addresses their distinct housing challenges and emphasises the urgent need for targeted policy interventions to improve their living conditions. This study concentrates on the issue by focusing on two research questions, namely (1) To explore the issues and challenges of migrant workers' settlement in Malaysia's urban area, and (2) To propose suggestions that can reduce the settlement issue among migrant workers. The significance of this study encompasses multiple classifications. First, by focusing on housing, this study sheds light on the significant impact of inadequate living conditions on the overall quality of life, well-being, and human and labour rights of migrant workers, emphasising the need for protective measures. Second, by linking the inadequate housing of migrant workers to the global housing crisis, this study underscores the broader implications of the issue, which calls for urging attention to the rights and conditions of migrants in Malaysia and beyond. Finally, by recognising the evolving geographical landscape of migrant localities in Malaysia, this study highlights the necessity of strategies or policy frameworks that consider the unique challenges that are faced by migrants, particularly in urban areas, for effective integration and sustainable development.

2. Methods

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore the intricate facets of migrants' settlement experiences in Malaysia's urban areas, facilitating a nuanced comprehension of the multifaceted factors impacting housing issues among migrants and exploring the local perspective on the presence of migrants, focusing on low-cost housing areas in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Commencing with an exhaustive literature review, the research synthesised existing studies on migrants'

settlement patterns and housing challenges in urban Malaysia to establish a robust theoretical framework by integrating relevant concepts and theories. The study utilises a literature review, leveraging Scopus and Mendeley search engines. This groundwork contextualised the study to provide a foundation by building upon existing knowledge and identifying avenues for further exploration. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore local perspectives more thoroughly, using inquiries guided by the literature review's findings. Purposively selected respondents are drawn from the intended audience, and the university has granted ethical clearance. This qualitative method has allowed open-ended discussions and personalised expressions of their housing experiences to capture individual narratives and nuances that are often overlooked in quantitative studies. Thematic analysis was then applied to analyse the qualitative data, encompassing insights from both the literature review and interviews. This systematic exploration identified patterns, recurring themes, and connections within the data, offering a detailed description of the migrants' settlement experiences and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the sustainable development challenges in urban areas.

Figure 2 shows the research flow of this study to address the housing and settlement challenges that are faced by migrant workers in Malaysia's urban areas. It began with a firm articulation of the problem statement to emphasise the significance of addressing these challenges within the contexts of human rights and sustainable development. The research objective was then formulated by focusing on exploring and understanding the intricacies of migrant workers' housing issues. This was followed by the development of the research questions to enquire into the obstacles, impact on well-being, and potential strategies and measures. Subsequently, an exhaustive literature review was done to explore the global experiences, policies, and repercussions of inadequate housing on human rights. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes from the interview data to enable a comprehensive understanding of the challenges. The findings were presented systematically and supported by visual aids, followed by the proposal of several actionable suggestions and policy recommendations that firmly link the study to the broader realms of sustainable urban development and human rights advocacy while also indicating potential avenues for future research or policy initiatives. In summary, the research methodology combined a comprehensive article review with semi-structured interviews to offer a holistic exploration of migrants' settlement in Malaysia's urban areas. This approach provides a theoretical foundation, captures diverse perspectives, and allows for a nuanced analysis that ultimately contributes to the sustainable development discourse. The research method flow for this study is described in Figure 2.

3. Result and Discussion

The number of respondents consists of two groups, namely, migrant workers and local residents. The migrant workers comprise Bangladeshi, Indonesian, Nepalese, and others. The local population consists of low- and medium-income groups who are homeowners and tenants in low- and medium-cost multi-storey houses around Kuala Lumpur.

Issues and challenges of migrants' settlement in Malaysia's urban area.

Housing affordability and accessibility are longstanding challenges in Malaysia, particularly in its capital, and represent an enduring housing crisis. Migrants encounter exacerbated difficulties as access to suitable housing is crucial for successful integration and the initiation of a new life (Ager et al., 2001; Ager & Strang, 2008; Yulfa et al., 2023). The scarcity of affordable housing, intensified by the global financial crisis, disproportionately affects average-earning workers and contributes to lower-quality housing. This situation greatly affects migrants, as studies on integration in EU member states have shown their vulnerability in the housing market, dependence on private rentals, lack of knowledge regarding their rights, and a higher risk of discrimination. In Malaysian cities, migrants have settled for years and faced substantial obstacles that adversely affect their overall well-being and quality of life.

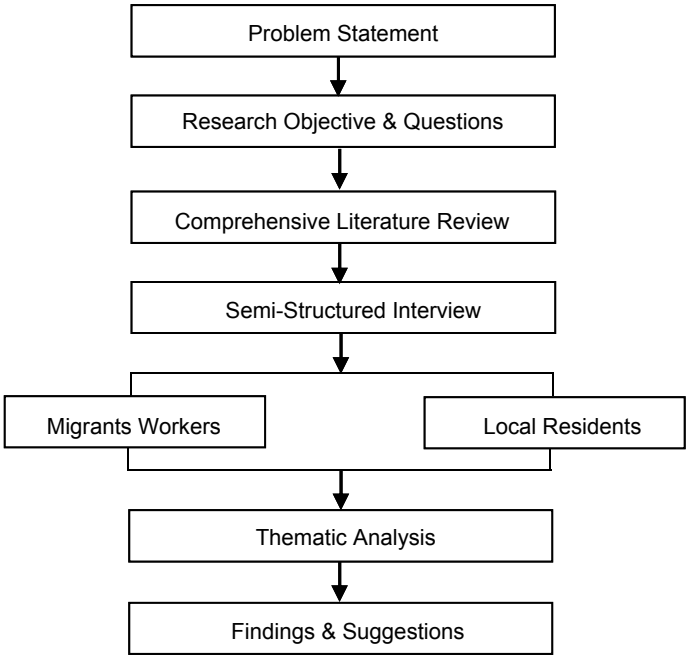


Figure 2. Research Method Flow

Overcrowded Living Conditions

Since World War II, overcrowding has evolved into a significant urban social issue. Household crowding arises when the number of occupants surpasses the available living space, measured by rooms, bedrooms, or floor area. Some researchers define overcrowding by considering the relative availability of space based on area and room quantity (Tao, 2017). Another approach involves categorising overcrowding by the norm of three people, including a child, per bedroom, with a person-per-bedroom (PPB) of 3.0 or higher indicating overcrowding (Islam et al., 2021). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018; Stats NZ, 2018). provides a more specific explanation whereby the extent of crowding depends on the house's size and layout, including room size, as well as the family's type, size, and needs, including any extended residents.

Crowding is assessed based on the required number of bedrooms and household demographics with different societies employing varying standards to define overcrowding. The British Bedroom Standard, Canadian National Occupancy Standard, and Equivalised Crowding Index (New Zealand) generally propose that no more than two people per bedroom should be considered overcrowded (Royuela et al., 2019). These standards assume a bedroom should accommodate two people with spouses and certain-aged children can share a bedroom. However, it evolves across nations and time as social norms and economic conditions change (Royuela et al., 2019).

Migrants in Malaysia commonly experience overcrowded living conditions due to a mismatch between home size and the number of occupants. As highlighted by Wahab (2020), migrant workers in Malaysia often reside in insecure and crowded conditions, such as living in converted longhouses to containers. SUHAKAM (2020) noted that a majority of migrant workers, especially in the construction industry, live in shared (*kongsi*) houses that typically accommodate 80 people. Migrant workers shared small living spaces to reduce expenses, leading to overcrowded units where privacy and personal space are significantly compromised. This issue is particularly pronounced in low-cost flats or informal settlements, where basic facilities such as toilets, kitchens, and common areas are shared among multiple families or individuals. Such environments not only contribute to health risks but also heighten social tensions between migrants and the local communities due to noise, hygiene concerns, and cultural differences, which further complicate integration efforts.

Subjective overcrowding, experienced as discomfort due to limited space in one's home, is a significant issue in migrant housing that poses risks to both migrants and the broader community. Migrants often reside in cramped, unhygienic conditions that impact their health, well-being, and societal integration. Recognising housing as a critical social determinant of health, the consequences of overcrowding on physical and mental health are well-documented. Factors such as inadequate living and sleeping spaces contribute to negative health outcomes, including psychological distress, and emphasise the importance of safe, affordable, and adequate housing for migrants (WHO, 2018; Goux & Maurin, 2005; Evans, 2003). Inadequate living conditions, characterised by limited space, poor ventilation, and restricted access to natural light, can pose risks to the residents' quality of life.

Informal House Existence

In developing nations, the persistence and expansion of informal settlements is one of the primary impacts of urbanisation and is considered the most obvious problem in the rapidly urbanising world. Despite the countless efforts to upgrade slums worldwide, informal settlements continue to be a ubiquitous harmful side-effect of urbanisation (Niva, Taka, & Varis, 2019). Informal settlement refers to a condition where a group of people has built a house on land that does not belong to them. Although these terms are not synonymous, these and other settlement types are a part of the larger urbanisation process that enables and permits the occupants to have extra-legal access to homes, land, infrastructure, services, and economic activities (Jones, 2017). The UN-Habitat's definition of an informal settlement is presumably the most frequently applicable (Amao, 2012). According to UN-Habitat (2003), informal settlement refers to residential areas whereby a number of housing units have been built on land that the occupants do not legally own or that they are occupying illegally, unplanned settlements, and housing locations that do not adhere to current planning and building regulations. These settlement typologies are continuously used to describe various forms, shapes, and patterns of illegal and or substandard residential enclaves that exist in towns and cities, despite the informality and specificity of the latter terminology in national and global reports (see, for example, their flexible use in the New Urban Agenda versus adherence to the word slum in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)).



Photo 1. Informal houses in remote area
Source: Utusan (2023)

Since 2003, the United Nations has described slum as a residential area with a lack of essential amenities (such as clean drinking water and proper sanitary facilities), the absence of tenure security, insufficient and crowded living conditions, unsafe structural conditions (UN-Habitat, 2003), and is exposed to various risks and vulnerabilities (UN-Habitat, 2016). According to Amao (2012), the key characteristics of informal settlements include inadequate access to basic services, a lack of social and physical infrastructure, and the absence of housing financing, as well as other informal characteristics such as criminal activity, social isolation, ill living conditions, and dangerous locations. Soyinka and Siu (2018) observed that individuals living in informal housing suffer significantly from social exclusion as a result of urban benefits such as public housing programs and social welfare systems, which prevent them from reaching health security. According to Bolt et al. (2010) and Parks (2014), those who live in urban informal housing are caught in a cycle of poverty since they also face various other aggravating factors such as scarce job possibilities, inadequate social networks, and insufficient local resources. These factors are incorporated as part of universal human rights in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting serious shortcomings in sustainable development (United Nations, 2011). Numerous factors can contribute to the existence of informal housing among migrants, including poverty, lack of legal residency or citizenship status, discrimination, and limited access to housing and social services. Most informal houses are constructed in remote areas of the wilderness in order to elude the enforcement authorities. This is exemplified by the case of an informal housing area consisting of tents that were found across a 29,000 m^2 hilly forest area near Ainsdale City, Seremban (see Photo 1) (Utusan, 2023).

Discomfort of Local Residents

The urban landscape of Malaysia has witnessed a significant rise in migrant numbers, leading to a demographic shift that not only contributes to cultural richness and economic vibrancy but also introduces challenges and discomfort among local inhabitants. The presence of migrants in crowded housing often causes irritation among locals and contributes to safety concerns. Local populations' apprehension about migrants is influenced by factors such as perceived higher crime rates and cultural misunderstandings. Research examining crime data and safety perceptions in areas with a substantial migrant population can provide insights into these concerns, reflecting the tensions arising from divergent cultures and interactions between locals and migrants.

"Previously I rented a unit of low-cost flat at Sg. Besi, Kuala Lumpur. Even though the rental rate was most affordable about MYR 450 compared to my current rental house about MYR 650, I was personally really unhappy to live there because of neighbourhood issue. There are migrants who shared the house with high density per unit even mixed between men and women. As Muslims in Malaysia, we are uncomfortable and cannot accept men and women who are not married living in the same house". (Respondent 1)

"If I buy a house priced below MYR 200,000, we can expect how the socioeconomic and neighbourhood are? and who we communicate with? I really take seriously about this because I need to set up a proper plan for my growing children. So, I want to provide a better environment for my children. Furthermore, if I buy such house, my children will be exposed to various social culture or migrants who occupy at that unit, so I am worried about my children's security and safety". (Respondent 2)

Controversial data highlights a significant demographic shift in Malaysia with one foreign resident for every ten Malaysians, leading to the emergence of ethnic refugee colonies from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Rohingya in the Klang Valley. This influx has resulted in the creation of distinct migrant colonies, thus raising concerns among the local population about the preservation of the area's local identity. Illegal migrants involved in these developments have established various facilities, which signal a long-term presence. Notably, a case study in Batu 8 1/2, Gombak, Selangor underscores local discomfort as the rising Rohingya ethnic population dominates the area.

"They (migrants) have no respect for local people. There is even a Rohingya man considered 'boss' among them and owns five stores collecting scrap metal. They often cause problems when they like to fight, get drunk, and gather in large groups until the early hours of the morning and make noise. It's not that we never reprimand their actions, but we are also scolded". (Respondent 3)

The convergence of diverse cultures in urban settings often enriches the sociocultural fabric. Yet, it introduces a complex interplay of perceptions, notably, local fears regarding migrant populations. This apprehension, rooted in safety and security concerns, shapes how migrants are perceived as potential threats, hence evoking worry and unease among established local communities.

"A local resident said, there was no problem when the ethnic group started to establish a foothold there around seven years ago, but the situation changed when their numbers increased. These people are involved in social problems such as often getting drunk and fighting with each other to the point of disturbing the peace of other residents. Some like to gathered in large numbers until late in the morning and made noise to the point of disturbing the peace of the residents. The highlight, when there was an incident where a 12-year-old girl was molested by a Rohingya man." (Respondent 4)

Local populations' apprehension about the arrival of migrants is often motivated by fear, cultural differences, and competition for resources. To address these concerns, it is critical to promote conversation, understanding, and integration between migrants and local inhabitants as well as to provide support and resources to both groups.

Suggestions to reduce the settlement issue among migrants

The global challenge of providing adequate housing for immigrants and refugees has prompted innovative strategies worldwide. To meet immediate housing needs, repurposing vacant structures, such as abandoned homes, offers a practical solution. Projects such as the Ohio's Dream Neighbourhood initiative demonstrate how revitalising existing infrastructure can address housing shortages while fostering community-based solutions. This strategy emphasises financial benefits such as increased property values and local economic

development through rental income and community involvement. By promoting mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchanges, revitalised neighbourhoods can support both recent arrivals and long-time residents. Encouraging settlement in rural areas with lower population densities and implementing urban rehabilitation initiatives further strengthens local economies and addresses housing needs effectively.

Governments in the UNECE region have responded to the escalating migrant crisis by moving beyond temporary solutions to implement sustainable housing strategies. Transforming emergency shelters into long-term housing options has become a key focus. For instance, during the refugee admissions surge in 2015, European cities such as Ghent, Belgium, introduced short-term housing solutions, including transit houses and additional rooms. These facilities provided interim support, enabling refugees and migrants to transition to permanent, sustainable housing. Such programs highlight the importance of comprehensive integration measures, including extended timelines and robust support systems, to ensure that migrants find suitable accommodation that is tailored to their needs. This approach fosters a stable and welcoming environment in the host communities.

Enhancing access to social housing is another critical strategy for addressing migrants' housing needs. In the Netherlands, regulated social housing initiatives have proven effective in integrating migrants. Managed by non-profit organisations, these programs provide affordable housing while promoting inclusive communities and social cohesion. Incentives for housing firms to engage in assimilation activities encourage collaboration between the government, community stakeholders, and migrants. By fostering mutual understanding and unity, social housing initiatives create sustainable and inclusive communities where both newcomers and long-term residents can thrive.

The establishment of housing cooperatives (Coops) offers another viable solution. Coops are private entities founded by residents to manage and improve their living environments collectively. Their primary goal is to provide affordable housing, but many also prioritise environmental sustainability and support underserved groups, such as immigrants, single mothers, and the elderly. The Stichting New Home Rotterdam (SNTR) project in the Netherlands exemplifies this model. Managed by the De Verre Bergen Foundation, the SNTR program purchases privately held properties, preventing displacement while funding language training, job placement, and education for refugees. This initiative underscores the potential of cooperatives to address housing shortages while fostering social integration and economic empowerment.

Modular housing is another innovative approach to meeting the housing needs of migrants. Prefabricated modular homes address challenges in the construction industry, such as high costs, limited land availability, and slow construction timelines. Countries such as Germany have successfully adopted modular housing for both permanent and temporary solutions. Cities such as Ostfildern, Geneva, and Kriftel have developed modular apartments offering privacy and a high quality of life for families. These housing models emphasise individual living spaces and family-oriented designs, marking a significant improvement over traditional reception facilities that often lack privacy and adequate amenities.

A persistent challenge for migrants is transitioning from temporary shelters to permanent residences. In Western Europe, varying timelines and housing policies complicate this process. Programs such as Belgium's rehousing allowance aim to alleviate these difficulties by providing financial assistance to migrants and disadvantaged individuals leaving reception centres. However, disparities in housing policies across European nations continue to pose challenges. While countries like the UK provide 28 days for housing transitions, others, such as Bulgaria, allow as few as 14 days. Addressing these discrepancies requires comprehensive reforms to ensure equitable access to adequate housing.

Addressing the housing needs of migrants requires a multifaceted approach combining immediate and long-term strategies. Initiatives such as repurposing vacant buildings, enhancing access to social housing, establishing cooperatives, and adopting modular housing are essential. Comprehensive policies must prioritise integration, economic stability, and community involvement while ensuring timely access to housing. Collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and local communities are crucial to creating inclusive and sustainable environments for migrants. Future research should explore broader geographical contexts and involve government collaboration to align policy frameworks with housing needs, fostering a nuanced understanding of local perceptions and challenges.

4. Conclusion

Migrants in Malaysia face significant settlement challenges, particularly regarding housing accessibility and overcrowding, which lead to unsanitary living conditions and heightened health risks. Informal housing exacerbates these issues due to insecurity, non-compliance with planning laws, and a lack of essential amenities, amplifying socioeconomic vulnerabilities and communal tensions. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches such as repurposing derelict buildings, enhancing social housing access, and introducing modular homes and housing cooperatives. To strengthen these strategies, the government should implement stricter monitoring and auditing mechanisms to ensure compliance with housing regulations, alongside heavier penalties for non-compliance and incentives for employers to meet housing standards. Collaborative efforts involving NGOs and community organisations can enhance oversight and provide critical support to undocumented migrants. Establishing a centralised grievance system for migrant workers will also facilitate reporting and addressing violations effectively.

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