

**Fleeing domestic violence in London:
informal politics and activist responses**

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1. Introduction

Recently, women's reproductive rights have been intensely threatened in different countries, even where the practice is legal. The fight for women's rights is a constant battle since gender, income and race inequalities are embedded in the patriarchal system. Consequently, this imbalance of power is manifested in different forms of violence.

One of them is domestic violence (DV), where women and children are abused by someone they know, usually in the domestic sphere, where should be a safe space. Domestic abuse (DA) has remained the highest rate among other kinds of gender-based violence in recent years in England and Wales, according to The Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2021c). It is also one of the leading causes of homelessness in the UK (Smith, 2005; Shelter, 2021b). The 2019 to 2020 Statutory Homelessness Annual Report (MHCLG, 2020) reported that one in eleven households in England (8,7%) were homeless or threatened with homelessness due to DA, and this number has been rising in England (Gayle, 2022).

The context for the exploration of this topic is the city of London, one of the wealthiest cities in the world that adversely find itself in another housing crisis with the financialisation of the space (Rolnik, 2013; Clapham et al, 2014; Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Wetzstein, 2017; Almeida, 2021; GLA, 2021), tenure insecurity (Unruh, 2007; Bone, 2014) and overcrowding as a consequence.

Escaping from DV is not an instant decision. It is reasonable to consider many factors that make them avoid leaving the relationship. Even if they do, they might return to their original homes for other reasons. Therefore, survivors seeking temporary accommodation (TA) have been traumatised multiple times by the perpetrator.

Additionally, finding accommodation can be bureaucratic, tortuous and often does not reach their expectations, configuring structural violence. Moreover, funding has been cut due to austerity policies either to benefits and DV services since 2010 despite the government recognition that would impact women and children seeking help (Bowstead, 2015b; Barge, 2017). These are some causes about feminist activist groups such as Focus E15 and Sisters Uncut are raising awareness.

By connecting the issue of DV and feminist housing needs, this research advocates for housing rights for survivors, which means access to proper TAs for women and dependents, and tenancy security. Due to privacy, high levels of security and hidden addresses, the refuges are unnoticeable (Abrahams, 2007, p.9). Similarly, according to Bowstead (2015a), the UK's forced migration caused by DV has not been recognised due to the limited quantitative work focused on internal migration filtered by gender.

The organisations are essential to finding refuge or proper accommodation since they are not connected directly to the government and can offer support for undocumented migrants despite the regulations reinforcing that survivors of DV can get help no matter their status (Lopes Heimer, 2019). Additionally, they have a more straightforward and humanised approach than housing officers.

With this introduction to the feminist perspective on housing in London for a vulnerable group, I will try to answer the question of how space and society shape TAs, housing policy and housing austerity and how it shapes the options for women and children. More specifically, how can the provision of refuges and social services change how we fight domestic violence and how can those involved in the private and public sectors work together to end homelessness?

This dissertation is divided into four sections: methodology, background (on DV, feminist perspective on housing and concept and type of TAs), analysis (of housing policies, the role of private organisations, rehousing and feminist activism movements) followed by conclusions that highlight the importance of affordable homes, different accommodations available and possible further improvements on policy, design and data collection.

2. Methodology

In order to answer my research questions, I used mixed methods followed by an academic literature review, legislation consultation, organisation and government reports and five interviews (6 interviewees) with London's DV¹ refuge and specialist support workers who have worked in these positions for the past five years. This decision meets my research ethics to not re-traumatise and de-stabilise victims' mental health, which is already extensively done by the experience itself, all the bureaucratic processes they have to go through to find a suitable and safe space urgently and by the process of home unmaking or un-homing, which means breaking the socio-spatial connections (Ellsberg and Heise 2005; Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard and Lees, 2020; Bimpson, Parr and Reeve, 2022).

Additionally, since the interview method comes from reliable sources, different or similar perspectives about the topic would be fastest presented. It is also important to highlight that all the interviewees were women, and unfortunately, despite numerous

¹ Choosing a feminist and intersectional perspective on housing, the researcher decided to oppose the British government and use domestic violence instead of domestic abuse to emphasise that this is a severe problem (Aldridge, 2021, p.1823-1824). This research also considers the exception if the information provided in the reference reading says domestic abuse.

attempts, housing officers could not participate in this study. For the data generation, video-calling (Zoom) was very convenient as the participants were very busy with their work and also facilitated the recording (the interviews took place in June and July 2022).

Unstructured interviews allow the topic to be explored with open-ended questions so the respondent can lead the conversation (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005, p.131). Moreover, with the ethics form previously approved and secured from the London School of Economics and Political Science Ethics Committee (section 7.1), a script with a reminder that the answers will be treated with confidentiality and the main questions is found in section 7.2 of this dissertation.

Interviewees', organisations' and refuge's anonymity and confidentiality were secured during the entire research project, and it will be protected in any future publication resulting from the study following one of the principles mentioned by Blee & Currier (2011) that 'ethics are involved in every stage of research' (2011, p. 404). Consequently, anonymity is essential to keep protecting victims of violence.

Personally, as a woman who has experienced DV and is studying under a visa status that does not allow access to benefits in the UK, I am also undeniably advocating for migrant women's rights.

3. Background

3.1 The concept of domestic violence

The primary motivation behind any violent act is to gain or maintain power (Moser and McIlwaine, 2006, p.93). Before narrowing the concept of DV, understanding the violence against women and girls (VAWG²) in rural and urban public and private spaces is essential to comprehend how they are interrelated. It is suggested that DV are more frequent in rural areas, whereas gender-based violence committed by non-partner is prominent in cities. (McIlwaine, 2013, p.67)

McIlwaine (2013) and Evans (2017) agree that although women can be more vulnerable to violence in urban spaces, it is easier to find help through formal and informal ways. McIlwaine (2013) suggests that gender-based violence can be enhanced in urban areas due to fragmented social relations and poverty. Consequently, poor women are prone to violence and the least able to escape these situations. Additionally, when women have the opportunity to gain independence, particularly in the context of poverty, the imbalance of economic power might raise the incidents of DV if male partners are unemployed or underemployed (Anderberg et al, 2013; McIlwaine, 2013; Bulte and Lensink, 2020) (Fig. 1).

² VAWG is considered a human rights violation (UN General Assembly 2009; WHO, 2013 in Bowstead, 2015a)

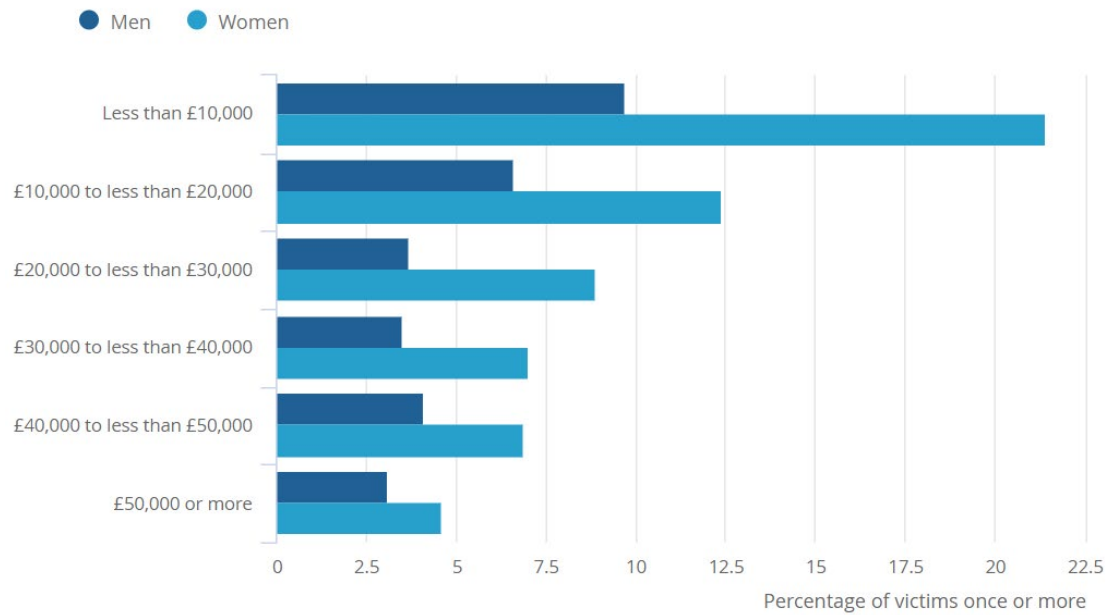


Fig. 1: Prevalence of DA in the year ending in March 2018 (the latest release) for adults aged 16 to 59 years by household income and sex (ONS, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, wealth is ethnically distributed (Fig.2); therefore, BAME and mixed women (Fig.3) would be more vulnerable to DV.



Fig. 2: Median household wealth by region and broad ethnic group in England between 2010-12 to 2016-18 (GLA, 2021)

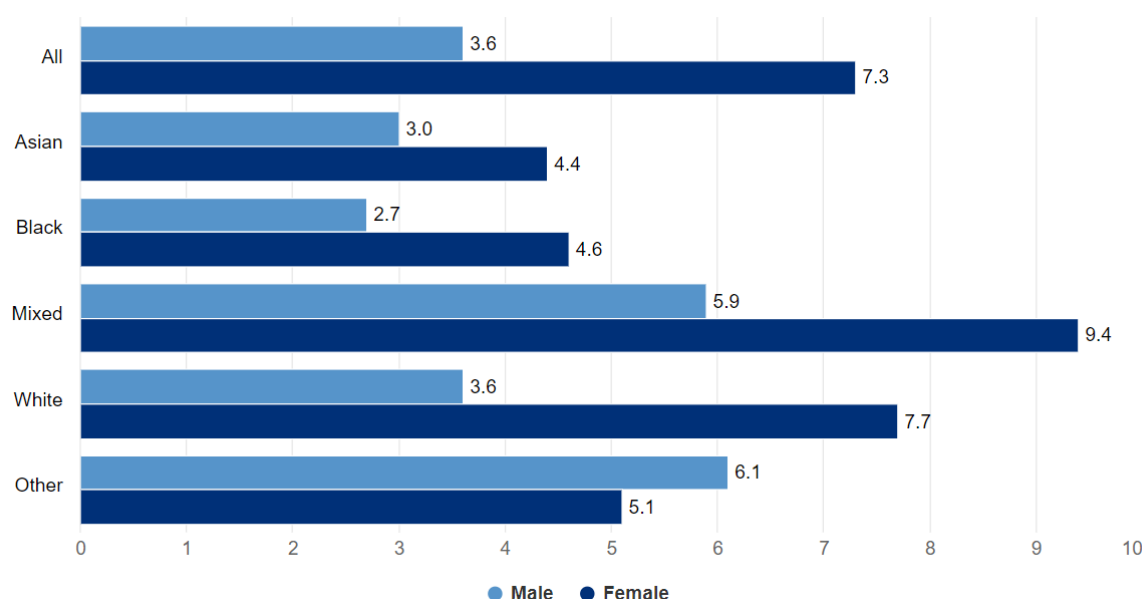


Fig. 3: Distribution of victims of DA by ethnicity and sex in England and Wales for the period between April 2017 to March 2020 (UK Government, 2021)

Evans (2017) writes about four rural-urban differences hypotheses that would bring benefits for women: economic opportunities; however, it would depend on how competitive the city is and if there are support services available in the neighbourhood; access to services can be better because of the demand in urban spaces and can also be more diverse and competitive; anonymity can be both an advantage and a disadvantage especially considering violence since everybody is a stranger in the city and a social network of support is often missing (Simmel, 1995), on the other hand, escaping from the perpetrator might be more straightforward; finally, heterogeneity is expected to catalyse social change, and I agree with her about large communities being more tolerant compared to small ones, whereas there is still much work to be done as it is going to be evident in the following sections explicitly in London.

DV is any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between intimate partners, ex-partners, a

relative or people sharing the same domestic space (not necessarily living together as stated in the Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018), regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexuality or background (Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018; ONS, 2021b). Additionally and recently, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 defines DA as any incident or pattern between those aged 16 years or over and includes controlling or coercive behaviour in the list. The law also recognises children aged under 18 years as victims of DA if they are related or have a parental relationship to the adult victim or perpetrator in case they witnessed and experienced the effects of the abuse.

Regardless of gender-neutral, statistical evidence clearly shows that DV is mainly gender-based and directed by men toward women (Aldridge, 2021, p.1825; Home Office, 2022). According to the latest data from the Women's Aid (no date b) website, women experience higher rates of repeated victimisation. They are more likely to be seriously hurt or killed than male victims of DA. Furthermore, women are more likely to experience higher levels of fear and are more likely to be subjected to coercive and controlling behaviours. (Fig. 4)

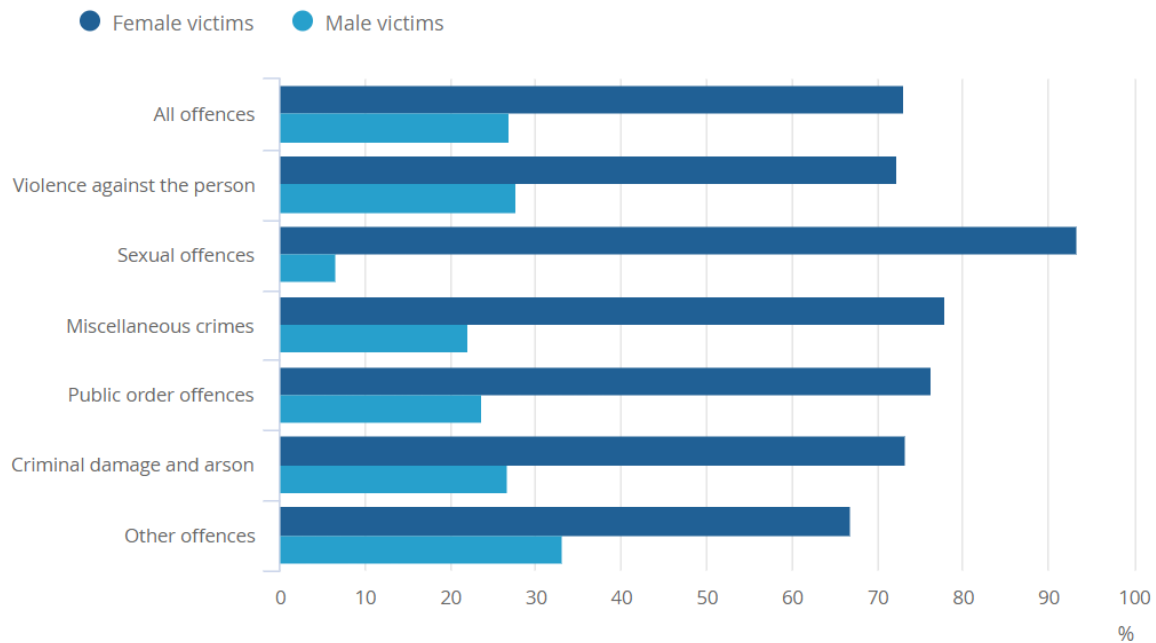


Fig. 4: Percentage of DA-related offences recorded by the police by sex of the victim and selected offence group, England and Wales, year ending March 2021 (ONS, 2021b).

DV significantly impacts the victim and is often long-lasting (Abrahams, 2007; ONS, 2021c), affecting physical, emotional, social, economic and personal integrity (Abrahams, 2007, p.118). Although women fear men in public spaces, statistics show they are more in danger at home (Valentine, 1989, p.386; ONS, 2020; ONS, 2021a) (Fig. 5) (Fig. 6). Given the invisibility of violence and shame, women feel very isolated and face difficulties finding help and reporting. Therefore, all the data presented show an under-reported number of crimes (ONS, 2020).

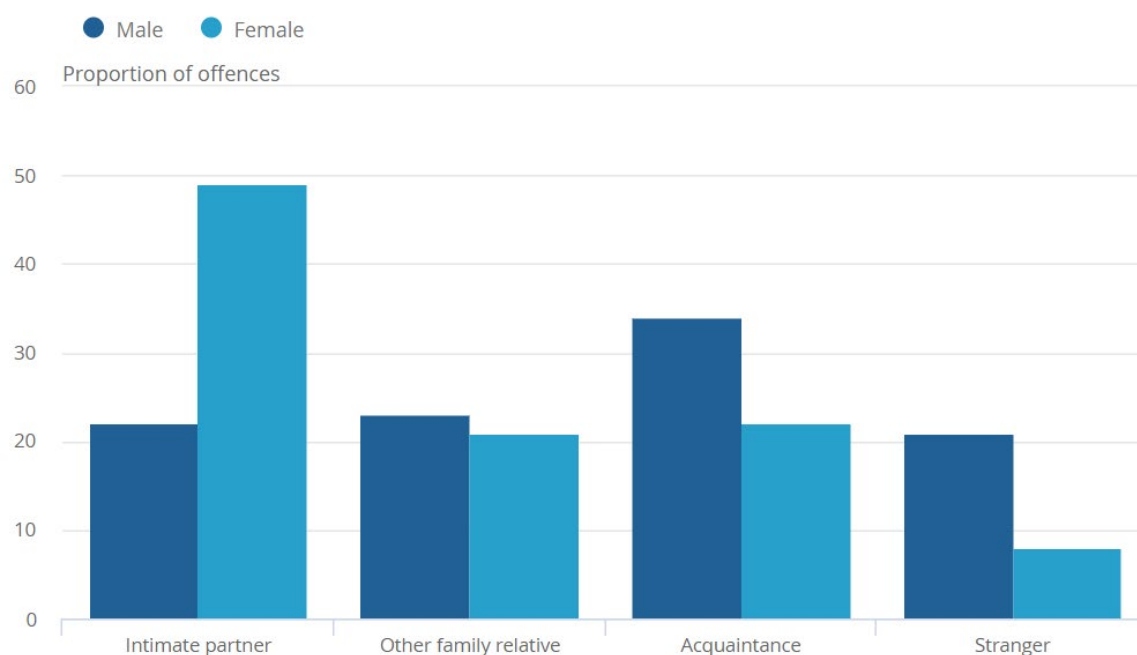


Fig. 5: The proportion of victims' gender by the type of offender in England and Wales, year ending in March 2020 (ONS, 2020).

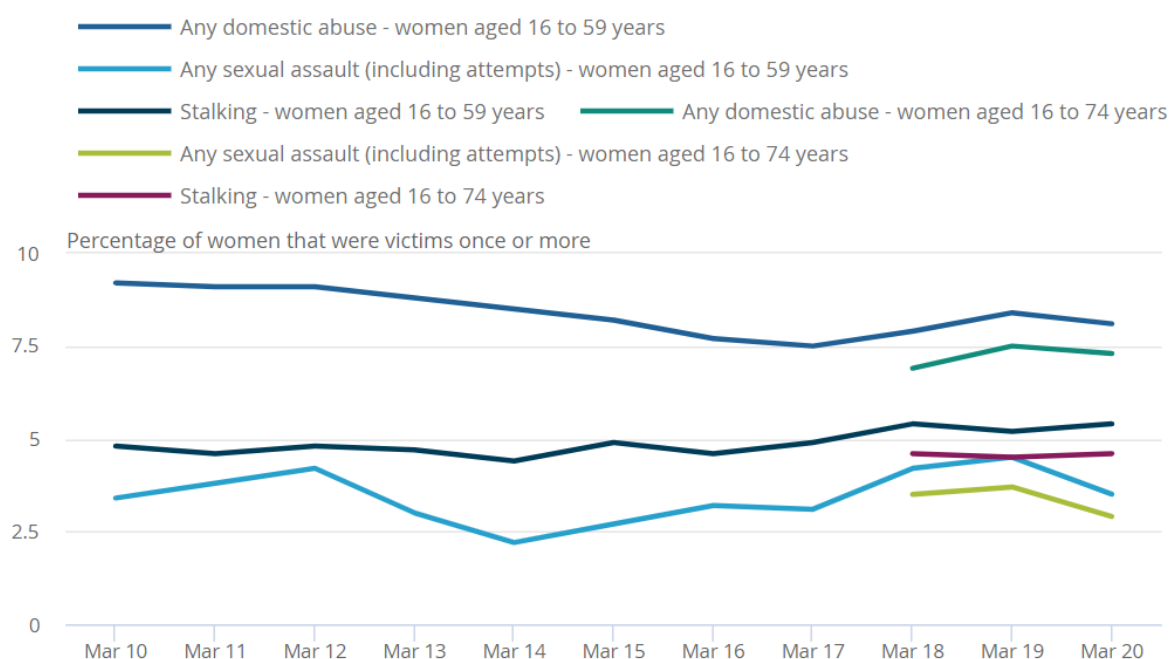


Fig.6: Year-on-year prevalence of DA, sexual assault and stalking for women aged 16 to 59 years and 16 to 74 years in England and Wales (ONS, 2021a).

The connection between rates of DV is the proportional pressure on demand for TAs and housing for survivors. Hence, the next part will cover the short history of housing and feminist movements and how this need has been supplied.

3.2 Housing and feminist movements

Housing rights are embedded in the right to the city since it is also a commodity (Lefebvre, 1996; Harvey, 2008; Rolnik, 2014). The right to appropriate and participate in public and private spaces is limited to those that can access them. More specifically, these rights are denied to women due to the dominance of patriarchal power (Fenster, 2005), which can be perceived differently. For example, contemporary urban theory and planning lack a feminist perspective of space (Beebeejaun, 2017), and Kern (2020) also reinforces that design and planning are not directed toward women and that the 'lack of public infrastructure of care work deepens inequality among women' (2020, p.38). All these decisions are combined to the social function of women's fear, that is, women's control, keeping them in private space, in heterosexual relationships and confined to care reproductive work (Valentine, 1989 and Kern, 2020).

Austerberry and Watson (1981) argued that a home is a private space where everyone in the household knows and should care about each other. Still, at the same time, it is where the patriarchal capitalist structure is maintained and reproduced. It justifies why housing has never been a central issue in the women's movement since other vital demands would come first, such as financial independence, sexuality and childcare, so independent access to housing would be possible.

Some design initiatives were proposed to re-establish the domestic responsibilities in cooperative and co-living forms to contest the designs available in 1960s American cities. On the other hand, there is no unique solution, 'they also desire solutions which reinforce their economic independence and maximise their personal choices about child rearing and sociability' (Hayden, 1998 cited in Kern, 2020, p. 181; Morrow, Oona and Parker, 2020).

At the beginning of the 1970s, the economy's deceleration in Western countries caused the first adjustments in funding for public houses and subsidies (Rolnik, 2013, p.1060). The feminist and housing movements were combined in London in the same decade. The housing crisis that previously culminated with organised squatting in the late 1960s 'highlighted both the failure of local council waiting-lists for housing and the callous removal of children into care when mothers became homeless' (Wall, 2017, p.81). The women-only squatting activist communities were able to find housing for single mothers, single women and women of colour. In addition, supporting spaces were also provided, such as nurseries, women's centres, workplaces and DV refuges. (Bowstead, 2015b; Wall, 2017)

There were also specific groups' refuge, in 1979, Southhall Black Sisters set up a safe space for Asian and Afro-Caribbean women. They advocated against restrictive access to services due to immigration status (Barge, 2017, p.11). In the same year, the housing associations got the responsibility to pick up the shortfall of social housing (Minton, 2017, p.48)

In the early 1980s, the neoliberal restructuring programmes started as a global phenomenon with the right-to-buy in the UK, meaning investment in homeownership and, as a consequence eliminating the costs of maintenance of social housing (Rolnik,

2013) while housing associations would be managing and developing subsidised housing (Manzi and Morrison, 2018). By the mid-1980s, the government started funding women's organisations as DV was recognised as a political issue in Britain (Harne and Radford, 2008, p.172). Unfortunately, according to Mackay (2008), the institutionalisation of the refuges (accommodation and services) indicated the end of the refuge movement's activism, making it more therapeutic in helping individuals rather than changing society (Merry, 2009, p.59).

Following alternative models of housing available for non-nuclear families, Austerberry and Watson (1981) mentioned the essential role of the housing associations and cooperatives in giving priority to certain groups from the housing waiting list since they have their policies regarding whom they can house. Consequently, it was possible to rehouse single women with children and older women. Additionally, the authors raise the cuts in funding, in 1980, for these types of managing agencies, indicating the beginning of another housing crisis.

For this reason, followed by another big funding cut in 2015, housing associations had to move to a hybrid business model to provide good quality affordable accommodations to meet a range of housing supplies rather than accommodating low-income residents (Manzi and Morrison, 2018). Although the private market has dominated the housing sector, the housing associations are still significant to prioritise causes of the feminist movement. As will be discussed, they are working with organisations to provide DV refuge.

3.3 Temporary accommodation

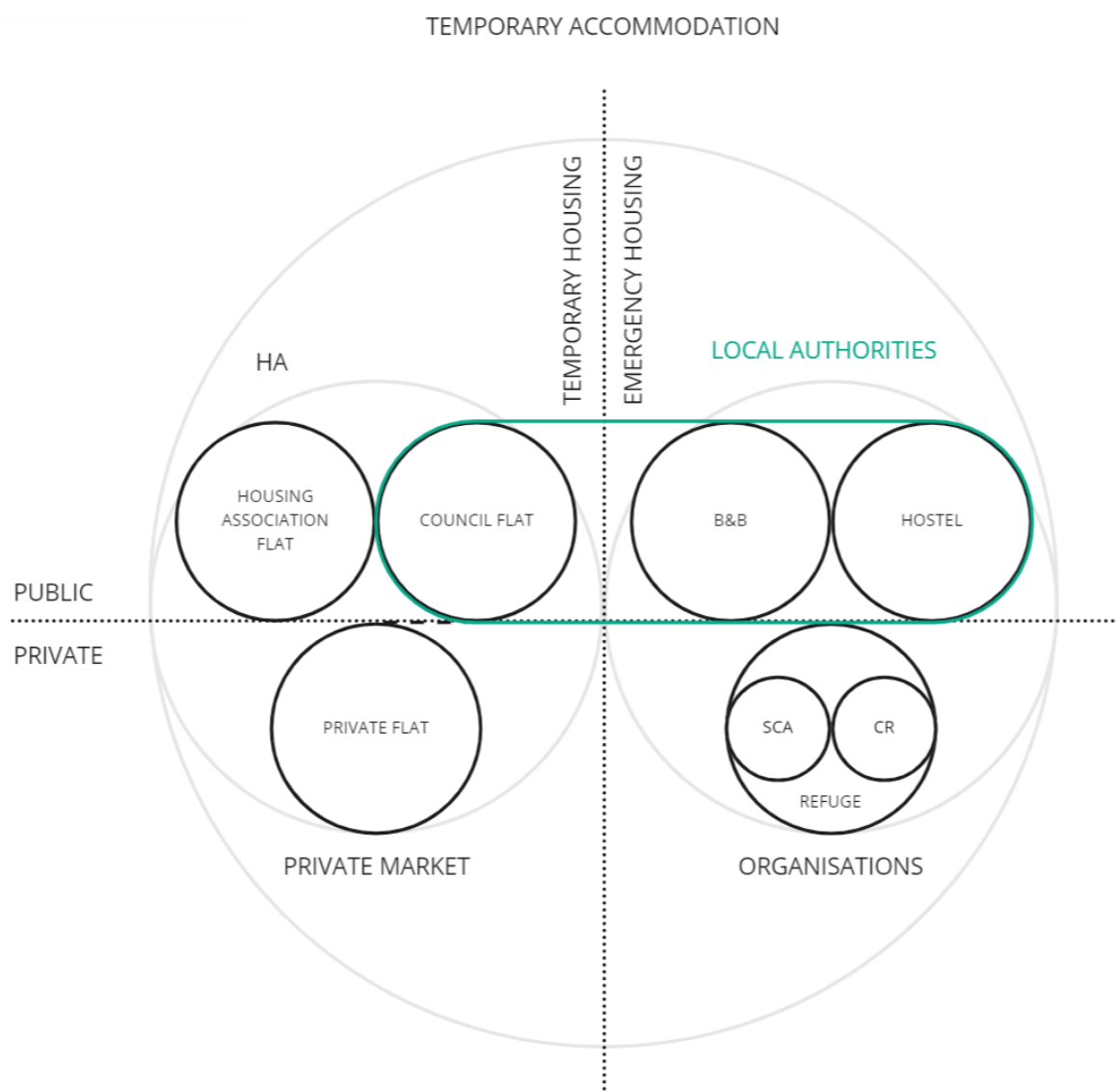


Fig. 7: Diagram of TA types and respective principal managers (Author, 2022).

Lopes Heimer (2019) uses TA as a general term for all accommodations for homeless people (Fig.7). It can be mixed gender B&B³ and hostels⁴. The issue is that this experience in mixed-gender shared spaces might reproduce the cycle of violence. It might be hard to adapt since it is difficult to predict how long the survivors will stay in the accommodation. Consequently, there is a chance for women and children to go back to live with the perpetrator. However, this is not a rule. There are different situations, even for migrants that might not adapt to a specific environment as described:

“Women from minority ethnic groups will not always choose to access specialist provision. Some may wish to do so while others may well prefer to access mainstream provision. Factors which may influence this decision might include perceived racism in mainstream refuges, lack of trust in their own community, specific cultural or language needs and the approach which the woman takes towards integration.” (Abrahams, 2007, p.36-37)

³ Bed & Breakfast Accommodation, known as ‘emergency accommodation’ for Shelter organisation, is defined by law as any accommodation with or without breakfast and where the bathroom and cooking facilities are shared by more than one household (Shelter, 2016, p.4). The Secretary of State Homelessness specifies that B&B accommodation is not suitable for family commitments and for any survivors of DV, especially children, since it can be prejudicial for their health Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003; Lopes Heimer, 2019; Shelter 2022a). A period of six weeks is usually considered for the stay.

⁴ According to the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, a hostel is a building managed or owned by a registered housing association or operated on a commercial basis, funded or partially funded by a government department or agency, or local authority or managed by a charity that also provides care, support and supervision for those who need to be rehabilitated or resettled in the community. Shelter (2022a) alerts that it is common to be referred to a hostel in London. At least one meal (breakfast or dinner) is provided, and the bathroom, kitchen and laundry are shared. Similarly to B&B, the tenant usually has to claim housing benefits, and there is an extra charge for heating, meals and laundry that should be covered by other benefits or income. Hostels are usually for homeless adult men, but some are specific for groups such as young and older women, for those who have experienced DA, mental health, or drug or alcohol problems. The temporary stay lasts from one to six months.

Barton and Wilson (2022) added other types of accommodation to the TA list, including private sector rented housing; social housing let on short-term tenancies; refuge accommodation and others, such as supported lodgings and mobile homes.

Temporary housing, as stated in Shelter (2022b), is one type of TA provided by the council to those who do not have suitable long-term housing (council or housing association home or private rented home). It can be a private flat, council or housing association flat or housing with support. The person or family are expected to stay for months or years in temporary housing in areas of housing shortage (Shelter, 2022b). In a situation of home insecurity, the homeless are a hostage of the housing system, waiting to be lucky and have suitable accommodation because if they refuse, there is a chance they might not receive another offer⁵. If they are evicted, they can be offered emergency accommodation, which worsens their insecurity.

According to Shelter (2021a), emergency housing is a type of short-term accommodation provided by the council for legally homeless people who have a priority need or are vulnerable such as someone who has dependents, are pregnant, victims of DV or are at risk. It can be offered as a self-contained flat, hotel or B&B, hostel or refuge with some shared areas (Shelter, 2022c). It is highlighted that B&B accommodation should be used as a last resource, especially for care leavers under 25 years old, pregnant women, victims of DV and those with children (Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003; Lopes Heimer, 2019; Shelter 2022a). Pets are not often allowed in emergency accommodation, but some charities run fostering schemes.

⁵ This condition is due to the Localism Act 2011, which gives power to local authorities to force families to accept the offer or face the consequences of living in the streets once the law protects and allows the council not to take responsibility for offering another alternative (Minton, 2017, p.95).

Regarding the rent in these cases, there is no obligation to pay it upfront, but the homeless have to be able to claim universal credit⁶ or housing benefits⁷ (Shelter, 2022c). There is no further information about how long it takes to claim for these or the period considered to pay for the accommodation. However, some of the interviewees disclosed the following:

You would have to just state that you are in danger and have access to benefits in this country. And that's it, you know. However, if you're an immigrant, that is very difficult because you have to wait until you have to apply for your special visa. And then once you get that, there's another way to confirm it, and then you can start claiming your benefits, but with Universal Credit, there's a 15-week wait, so it's a very long time before you actually receive the money. And unfortunately, you know, every single refuge particularly is, you know, working on a stretch budget and cannot afford to kind of, you know, every room has to be rented for. So it has to be covered by either the, maybe the woman herself will be able to pay the rent, or have access to the benefits to be able to, for it to be covered with housing benefit. So money's an issue. (Knowledge Management Officer)

I mean, anyone can access it as a refuge, but actually, a refuge space is really expensive. So, you know, to most, for most women to be able to access, they need it to have access to a public resources, to public funds;

⁶ It is a help for housing payments (rent or mortgage, for example), and if the claimant is living in temporary housing, it can help with living costs (UK Government, no date a)

⁷ It is a financial help when the recipient lives in a TA arranged by the council, in a hostel with care, support and supervision or a refuge for survivors of domestic abuse. (UK Government, no date a)

otherwise, they will have to pay privately, which would be a lot more than renting a house. (Research and Policy Coordinator)

Usually, women and families at high risk are referred to a refuge, where it is possible to have intensive care and different kinds of support. It is where they can establish a plan of action, 'a sanctuary from the violence' (Abrahams, 2007 p.105), and 'a launching pad into a new phase of life' (Abrahams, 2007 p.89). The difference between a hostel for those who experienced DV and refuge is the period of stay, support services available and the character of these accommodations. The first one is a short-period overnight stay with essential support services and which tenants might share the room. In contrast, the refuge has the protection of survivors and recovery of the trauma as a priority. Therefore, the period of stay is a bit more flexible depending on each situation and the rooms are not usually shared.

There are two types of refuges: self-contained accommodation⁸ and communal refuges⁹. Despite the first giving more privacy to the woman or the family, the second gives a sense of community since these survivors can feel they are not alone. Instead, they are in similar situations, which can give them more strength to fight for independence. (Abrahams, 2007, p.77)

The period they should stay in the refuge will depend on the availability to find a proper and more definitive home and the autonomy capacity of these women. The

⁸ Self-contained accommodations are rooms or flats with additional facilities such as own cooking and toilets that give the family more privacy (Abrahams, 2007, p.77). One of the interviewees, the Specialist Housing Advisor, mentioned that this type of accommodation would be suitable for transgender women both for their privacy and to give them more protection as there are still issues in women accepting trans women.

⁹ Each woman or family has its room. However, sharing communal areas, kitchens, toilets, and bathrooms is not the only challenge. Cleaning these areas is also their responsibility, and because there are different levels of expectation, it can be tricky to maintain a good relationship. (Abrahams, 2007, p.75-76)

first refuges believed three months would be sufficient (Abrahams, 2007, p.90). Afterwards, this interval was expected to be between three to six months (Levison and Harwin, 2001, cited in Abrahams, 2007, p.90). However, as said before, everyone has a different recovery speed, and the effects of DV last for an extended period. Therefore, some organisations consider exceptions, but they are also aware that others are also in need.

The temporary space known as a safe place is not only restricted to the walls of the refuge. It also involves the neighbourhood, reaching public spaces and other spaces of support, such as nurseries, schools and all different places they might navigate (Warrington, 2001; Rolnik, 2014). Furthermore, the community involved in providing everything needed for the refuge to operate and even those accommodated are responsible for maintaining discretion about the location and personal data (Abrahams, 2007, p.116).

In order to understand the latest trends of households relying on TA, Barton and Wilson (2022) presented the following quantitative data considering both genders and unrelated to DV. However, it is distressing to notice the great majority of households with children in TA (Fig.8), the sharp increase of people depending on these types of accommodation in the last ten years (Fig.9), the role of the private sector in controlling considerable slice of the property market (Fig.10) and how still one-third of Londoners have to move outside the borough to access them (Fig. 11).

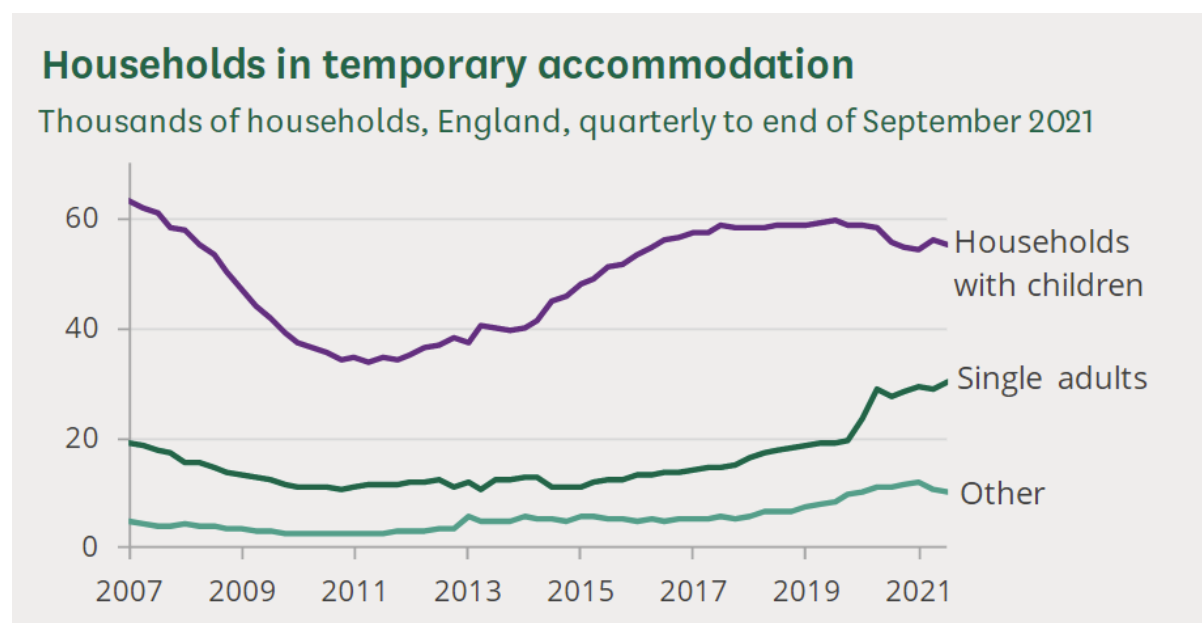


Fig. 8: Number and type of households in TA from 2007 and 2021 (Barton and Wilson, 2022)

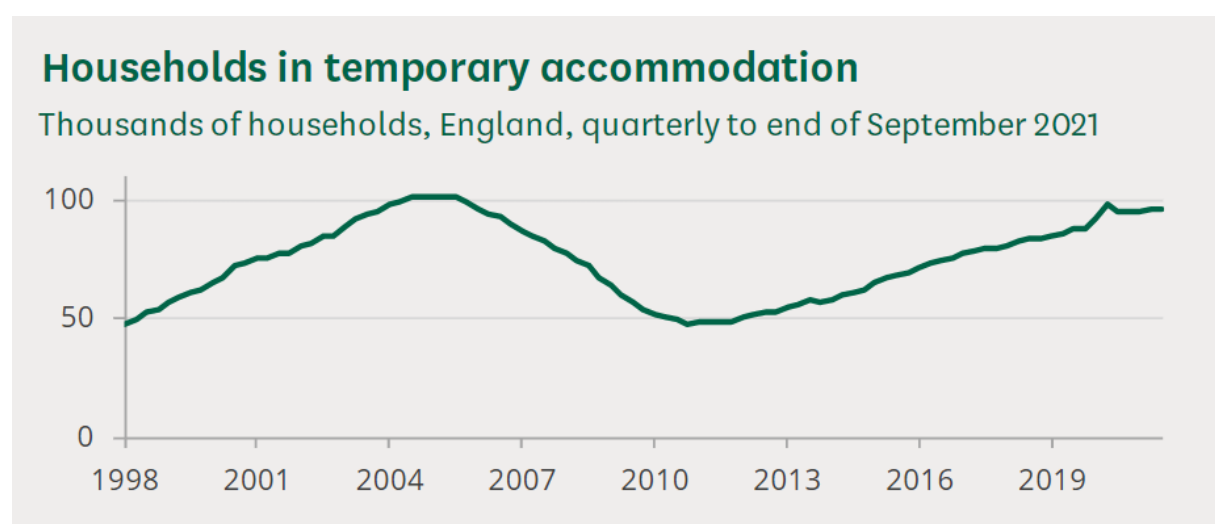


Fig. 9: Number of households in TA per year, from 1998 to September 2021 (Barton and Wilson, 2022).

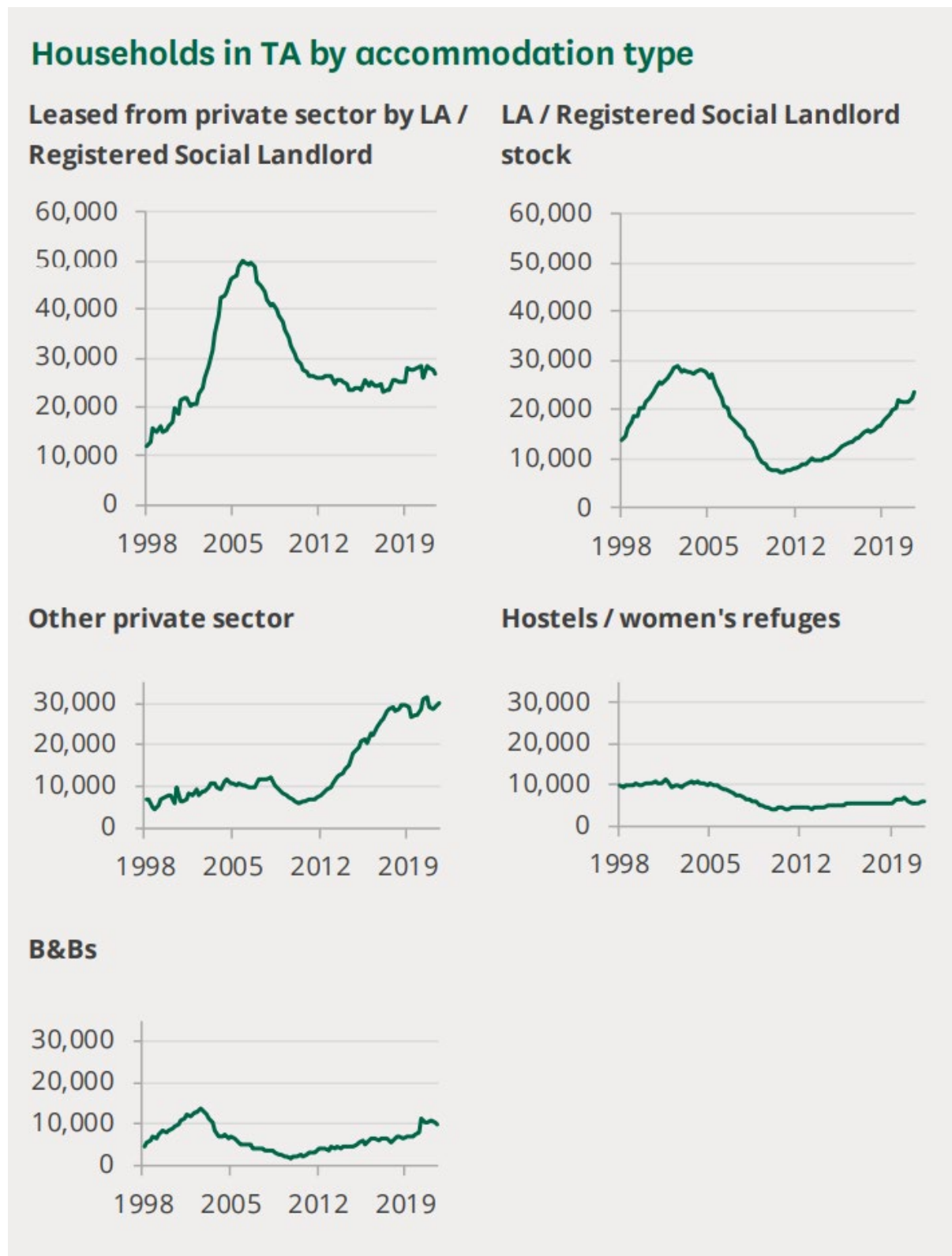


Fig. 10: Households by type of TA accommodation per year, from 1998 to September 2021 (Barton and Wilson, 2022).

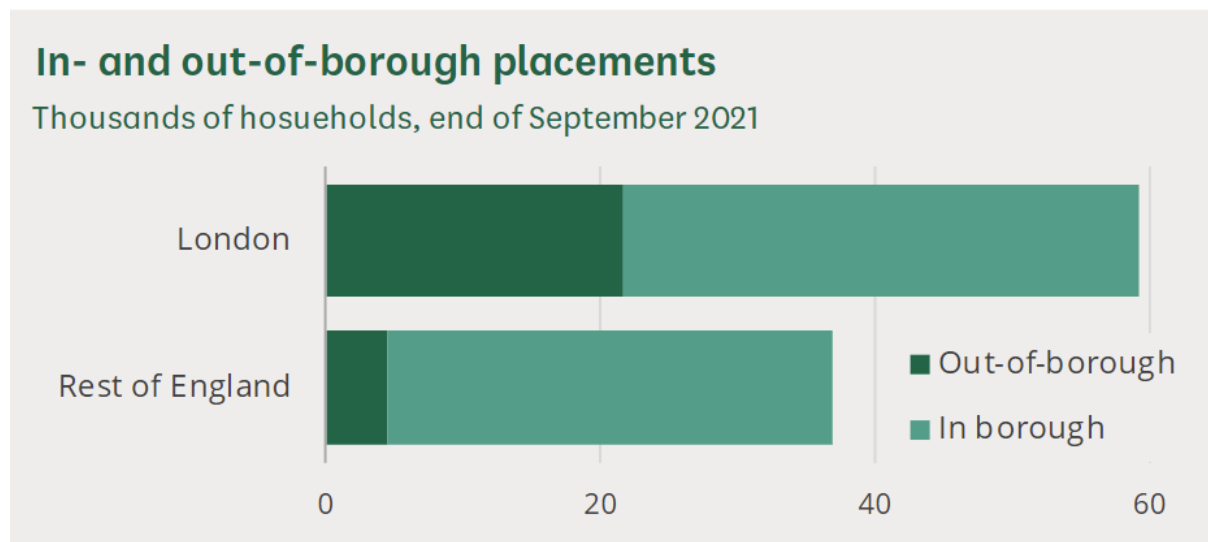


Fig. 11: Households (thousands) placed in and out of the borough's TA (Barton and Wilson, 2022).

Even though scholars have acknowledged the lack of the feminist perspective in architecture and planning, the social control of women and other minority groups still exists within the institutional governance structure (Kern, 2020, p. 129), which is the topic of the following sections.

4. Analysis

4.1 Governance of Housing and Domestic Violence – piece of legislations

In this section, the principal housing regulations will be discussed in chronological order. The participants in this study indicated them, and the Localism Act 2011 was found in Minton's (2017) thesis, which is essential to close the narrative on women finding a place to call home.

4.1.1 Housing Act 1996

This regulation covers all kinds of relationship situations in an agreement related to housing in England, Wales and Scotland. Therefore rental, buying, relevant authority powers, financial and benefits matters, homelessness¹⁰ and allocation of a housing accommodation.

The fact that 'a local housing authority (LHA) may allocate housing accommodation in such manner as they consider appropriate' (Housing Act 1996) indicates bias. The responsibilities of the borough are explicit. However, no punishment is indicated if the public institution does not comply with them. On the other hand, some kind of penalty is straightforward for those considered intentionally homeless¹¹. They can appeal, but it would take time.

Lopes Heimer (2019) also mentioned misconduct from the police, where prejudice (towards BAME¹² women and/or those who do not speak English) limits their guidance to the options available or carelessly records the report given. Hence, Valerie's law (in the process of being approved) defended by Sistah Space¹³ wants to make it mandatory for all policemen and government agencies to have the proper training to support black women and girls affected by DV.

¹⁰ Homelessness is the lack of the features that are used to create a home (legal, physical and cultural domains) rather than a roof (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Busch-Geertsema et al, 2014).

¹¹ A person would be homeless intentionally as a consequence of leaving the previous accommodation even though it would have been reasonable for the household or failure of a rent payment that led to rent arrears and eviction despite the rent being affordable (Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018)

¹² Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

¹³ It is a non-profit community-based organisation that aims to make DA services accessible to African heritage women and girls (Sistah Space, no date)

4.1.2 Homelessness Act 2002

According to Laurie (2004), the Homelessness Act 2002 is an amendment to the 1996 Act and reinforces the local authorities' power rather than its duties. Although it describes in more detail who are people in priority need of accommodation, including vulnerable people due to violence (Lopes Heimer, 2019, p. 14) and extends the category to other homeless people (Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018), the ineligibility of an applicant for social housing is based on his or her unacceptable behaviour. What has been considered unacceptable behaviour is unclear, and there are very different and individual situations to consider. Additionally, the points scheme implemented to turn the priorities more impartial turned out to be complex to the point that it is not even transparent for the housing applicants.

4.1.3 Localism Act 2011

The Act gave local governments the autonomy and power to conduct their expenses (Bowstead, 2015), changed the social housing criteria, and can discharge their duty if the housing offered is refused (Minton, 2017). Regardless of the optimism of the plain English guide to the Localism Act (DCLG, 2011), the totalitarian way that autonomy has been conducted hampers any possibility of challenging it, as it is possible to notice through the quotes below:

“For example, despite the housing crisis, Hammersmith and Fulham Council cut its housing waiting list by almost 90 per cent in 2013, from more than 10,000 people to 1,100, after imposing a rule that only who had lived in the area for more than five years were eligible to apply.” (Minton, 2017, p.95)

Yeah, Ring, ring fence, the money, you know, like, the since 2012, that there's been the (...) look, I've forgotten the name now, the [Localism] Act. Was that, yeah. By the coalition government. They, they cut into a lot of the local authorities autonomy and ring fencing of key community services, you know, and one of the key things that got the biggest hit was emergency housing and services for the homeless, you know, so, obviously victims of DV who flee their, their abusive home are automatically homeless, you know, so, emergency housing is absolutely fundamental to ensure you know, the safety of these women and their children, you know, but unfortunately, that that has been cut too so. (Knowledge Management Officer)

4.1.4 Homeless Reduction Act 2017

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 also amends the Housing Act 1996 since it requires local authorities to properly assess all households' needs (Garvie, 2018, p.8) to prevent and relieve homelessness. After years of misconduct and letting non-priority people without help, it is the first time an Act has tried to improve its housing provision service. Thus, ideally, people at risk of homelessness cannot be turned away. Instead, they should be assessed and receive advice and assistance. However, it is still unclear who will enforce this duty and how people should be assessed.

Women tend to be brushed to the side by councils, I often tell them to go in person instead of calling as they find it harder to get rid of the woman. It is not fair that they are experiencing violence from a partner then have to be fighting for their right too. (Referral and Advice Line Worker)

Another shocking fact uncovered by a Knowledge Management Officer was that local authorities get law training from a charity. Unfortunately, not all local authorities are interested, indicating that service quality differs from council to council.

4.1.5 MHCLG¹⁴ Homeless Code of Guidance for Local Authorities 2018

Unlike the previous regulations, the code works as guidance on how housing authorities should deliver their responsibilities as a way to improve the service. For example, they need to comply with the public sector equality duty, promote and protect the rights of vulnerable people and disadvantaged groups, and consider human rights implications as a result of the use of their powers. It also suggests that LHAs should have more control over supply and demand in their districts. Hence, it would be possible to offer a more efficient service in providing suitable accommodations and implementing a homeless strategy accordingly. Everything is perfect on the paper, in any case.

So yeah, local authority housing policies that guarantee [emergency housing], I don't know. But I will say that in practice, they don't tend to stick to whatever policy they have. You know, I'll go into that more detail if you'd like, but if there's well, okay, so for example, prior to Brexit, as in the legal exile of the UK from the European Union. It wasn't that set in law. However, we saw that a few local authorities just dismissed EU passport-holding victims of domestic violence as not eligible anymore because they were EU nationals.

¹⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government is currently the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, responsible for managing funds for local authorities and overseeing local government, planning and building safely. (DLUHC, no date)

However, that had not been made law by then. (Knowledge Management Officer)

Regarding DV, the code gives important recommendations in terms of giving priority and protection, including avoiding rehousing people to risk areas) however, before that stage, section 177 says that a person or household members cannot stay in the same accommodation if proven they are at risk of DV. I asked one of the interviewees how someone could prove that in such a situation:

The frontline worker deals with the person and talks with them about their story. It's quite obvious what the person is going through, you know, it's very hard to lie about, especially to an experienced frontline advisor, like, they'll pick that up straight away, but very few people do. The thing is, it's not a, it's not a luxurious process, let's say, you're leaving your home, and your stability and everything that you fundamentally know, to be jumping into this crazy house, with all the victims and their children. You're in the hands of an organization, and then suddenly, you know, the police, the council, the institutions, the schools, the doctors, all of these things that get changed. So it is not a fun and easy process that people just go on to kind of claim some free housing, you know, as is the kind of prejudice I guess, you know, it's like, in terms of proving to the organization that supports you. I would say there's not much proof needed. All they'll do is support you and help you get to safety, you know? (Knowledge Management Officer)

Chapter 21 is explicitly dedicated to the DV topic. It is interesting to observe general recommendations such as not re-traumatising victims while finding help and giving an option to be interviewed by an officer of the same sex, as well as providing

translation services when necessary. I would like to highlight the reinforcement of sections of the 1996 Act, such as that the LHA needs to secure accommodation for needy families as a whole. On the other hand, it again falls into the availability of these accommodations and its rules:

They can come up with children too. But yeah, so it would be for in terms of age, for example, we wouldn't accept boys are older than 14. And yes, because of the sizes of our rooms, you know, and how comfortably they can be accommodated, you know, it's up to three children. And this is because one of our refuges does have like the capacity to have, you know, families that big.

(Refuge Director)

Additionally, alternative support from the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession is available if someone has 'entered or stayed in the UK as a spouse, unmarried partner, same-sex or civil partner of a British Citizen, or settled citizen and this relationship has permanently broken down due to domestic violence and abuse.' (Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018). This scheme allows this person to apply for limited leave to remain, which lasts for three months, where they can access public funds and legal advice to plan the next steps.

4.1.6 Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The Act strengthens the support for victims of DA, considering women and children as automatically homeless as soon as they leave their homes. Albeit it should be considered a victory to have this new law, there are two critical issues: the exclusion of the same rights for migrant women despite tireless campaigning and criticism and the omission of the word "refuge" as an essential type of accommodation that local authorities also fund under the statutory duty (Women's Aid, no date a; Equation, no

date). The following statement is from an interviewee that used to work in an organisation three years ago, and she stresses the difficulties of migrant women in accessing benefits:

So, in practice, to access a refuge, you actually have to have like public funds, access to public funds. That means that you, you know, in this (...) this is accordance with your immigration status, and this hasn't (...) hasn't really changed with the Domestic Abuse Bill¹⁵. So I think that's, that's like one of the main kind of issues, to be honest, in terms of like migrant women, that there isn't like really provision. I mean, there are certain extent depends on your immigration status. So if you're like a spouse of a British citizen, you can apply for the like, domestic abuse concession rule and I can also apply to indefinitely to remain also, I think if you now (...) I don't know, also, because I think a lot of stuff has changed with Brexit, you know, like, but before, you know, like, obviously if you're, you know, like had a European Union (...) European citizenship or like were married to European citizen then you would have, you know, access to, to public funds. Now, I don't know, but I think probably like a lot of Europeans also, you know, have no access to public funds in certain circumstances. And it was already the case in the past, because if they couldn't prove that they weren't, or have been working [in our department?] have been working. So there are loads of little gaps there. That makes it quite, quite complicated, actually. And also leave a lot of women without, without the

¹⁵ Domestic Abuse Bill is the draft of the Domestic Abuse Act published in January 2019 (Home Office, 2022). Organisations had criticised the Bill, especially concerning the protection of migrant women, before being officialised on the 15th of July 2022, but it was still not considered (Women's Aid, no date a).

support, you know, like, and without access to the refuge. (Research and Policy Coordinator)

4.1.7 Summary and Further Considerations on Homeless Legislation

The changes in legislation are very slow. I understand this process as a patriarchal and capitalist system consequence and specific in the context of the UK. Regardless of a manual of good practices, there is no legal instrument that enforces it and brings consequences to the housing officers. Instead, the policies end up reproducing the housing problem (Madden and Marcuse, 2016, p.70).

In addition, the interest in partnership and training should be the LHA's interest in order to tackle homelessness. Having the expertise but not the power, the private organisations are essential since they are working as a social interest party, advocating for human rights and pushing responses from LAs. However, they do not have the power to audit, a responsibility that the other party should take.

The Homelessness Code of Guidance 2018 is the only document that openly recognises that the lack of affordable housing can lead to the increasing number of homeless and, therefore, the need for more TAs. Hence, investing and providing real affordable and social housing would ease the housing crisis and prevent homelessness. Considering the independence of DV survivors and their safety priority, having a long-term established home would ideally be the only step they should go through.

Bretherton's (2020) work, two years after the code had been launched, reveals multiple barriers to access the services under the homelessness laws, especially for

lone women. Likewise, the participants in this research also stated the same and Minton (2017) and Women's Development Unit (2022) bring attention to the fact that there is a large hidden homeless population (single people or childless couples) 'who may be sofa-surfing, sleeping on buses, rough sleeping, in hostels or in illegal accommodation' (2017, p.95)

"Women's homelessness makes up the majority of all recorded homelessness (...). Women comprise 67% of statutory homeless people, and single mothers make up two-thirds (66%) of all statutory homeless families with children." (Women's Development Unit, 2022, p.4)

Bimpson, Parr and Reeve (2022) indicate another important point through conflicting welfare policies: housing and children's social care, in which some women are 'punished' for neglect for being homeless. Separated from their children, these women are classified as 'single' by LHA and end up in the hidden homeless population group, similar to the 1960s failures from the same institution.

4.2 Private organisations

Even though feminist activists organised themselves to provide refuge and other basic needs for homeless women in the 1970s, the sisterhood character and the non-existence of hierarchy gave trust to those involved. Since funding from the government (Harne and Radford, 2008, p.172) transformed informal assistance into social service, it broke the movement's collective feature, creating more barriers between these women (Warrington, 2003; Abrahams, 2007).

Additionally, the Localism Act 2011 limits the charity network since they are funded locally but not exclusively. Organisations can also receive private funding for business tax deductions (UK Government, no date b). Although it is possible to see them collectively contributing to each other through online platforms (criticising the Domestic Abuse Bill, for example), I cannot be sure how they are actively fighting DV. It does not mean their work is not legit, I believe they are doing what they can to provide all the support for survivors.

Contact with other organisations and their local community is crucial to keep and improve their work. That is how I discovered that properties used as refuges are usually owned by the organisation and housing associations. A good relationship and shared responsibilities make these safe spaces possible. As the participants said:

We have 5 refuges in our area. Some of those are from our organisation and some belong to a housing association. I am unaware of how those are found, where I worked before the director explained it was through a friendship she had with a manager within a housing association. (Referral and Advice Line Worker)

So basically, we have a long-term kind of relationship and partnership, shall we say, with housing association? And that's (...) that's how I found those those houses. So we rent we rent their houses from (...) from the Housing Association, so we are not owners of them. (Organisation Director)

I also asked the director how organisations plan to have refuges in other boroughs if they depend on relationships with housing associations, and the answer was surprising.

I don't know if you're too familiar with housing associations' history in this country, but [redacted], there was a smaller proper housing association. Okay. Right now, they kind of merge with the larger one. And these really are essentially property developers. So yes, in terms of legally speaking, there are housing associations, but they are to all extents and purposes like private property developers. So there's largest conglomerates, that's what I'm saying. So they have properties all over London, and indeed, the UK. (Organisation Director)

Moreover, an unofficial conversation also raised that some organisations help survivors find accommodation through websites and mobile applications (Fig.12). This is associated with the following topic, rehousing.

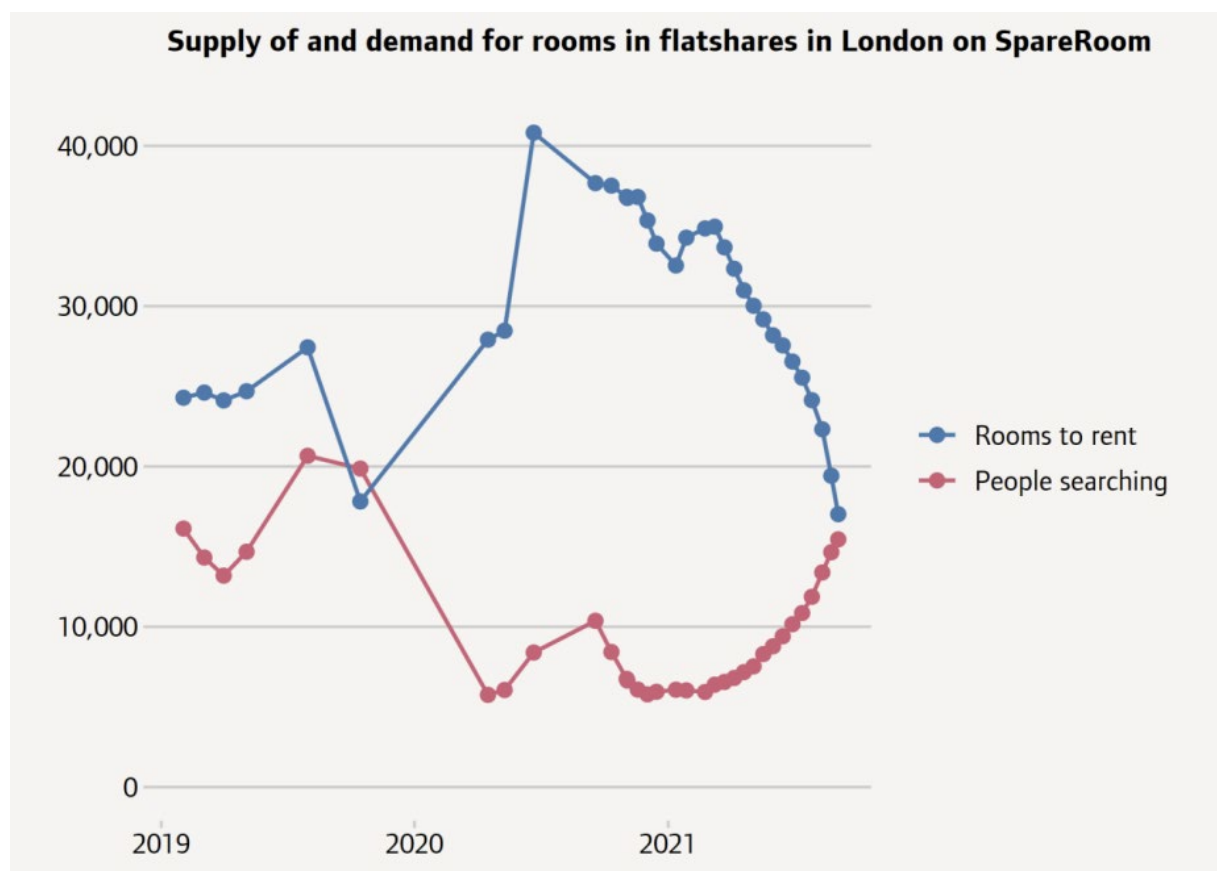


Fig.12: Supply and demand for rooms in flat shares in London on Spare Room. (GLA, 2021)

4.3 Rehousing: pursuing a place to call home

But the thing is, the issue comes is at the end, because in the end, women have to live, even if we say up to three or six months. So the issue starts again, when they have to be housed. Because they have to start the process with the local authority. Yeah, she's going through the homelessness process. So this process implies that they have to go to a temporary accommodation, again, even I mean, can be a mixed accommodation content, by in the end the process cannot continues. So it's not like they leave the refuge and they will be provided a permanent accommodation. Yeah, that is not the case. (...) So whereas if they go straight into a temporary accommodation from the beginning, obviously, they will escape. [redacted], it doesn't mean that they will have the support that is provided in the refuges. (Housing Advisor)

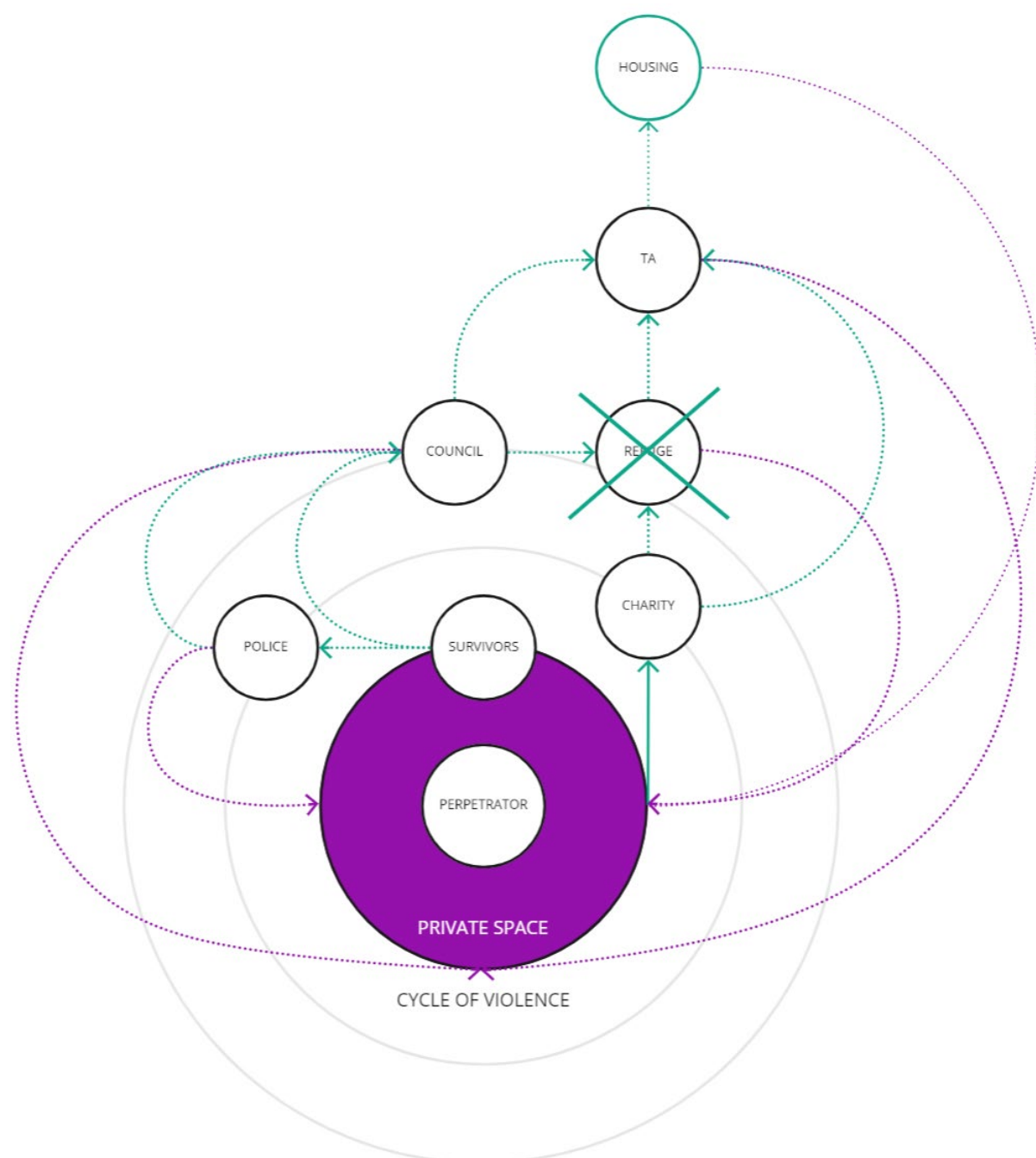


Fig. 13: Diagram showing the possibilities of escaping DV. The purple indicates the possibility of returning to the cycle of violence and homelessness, and the green shows the possibility of escaping. The arrows designate the direction of the movements of survivors. It also illustrates the stages survivors must go through to reach a place they can finally call home (Author, 2022).

The housing crisis issue and the lack of suitable TA within a realistic timescale are the main factors that might force these women to return to their perpetrators (Abrahams, 2007, p.90; Lopes Heimer, 2019) (Fig. 13). It is important to mention that adequate funding is essential to tackling homelessness. However, it is not the solution since it becomes unsustainable if a suitable and affordable accommodation cannot be found (Garvie, 2018). Kern (2020, p.125) also points out that if the affordable housing available is located in an unsafe area, it will still be unsuitable for them. (Fig.14)

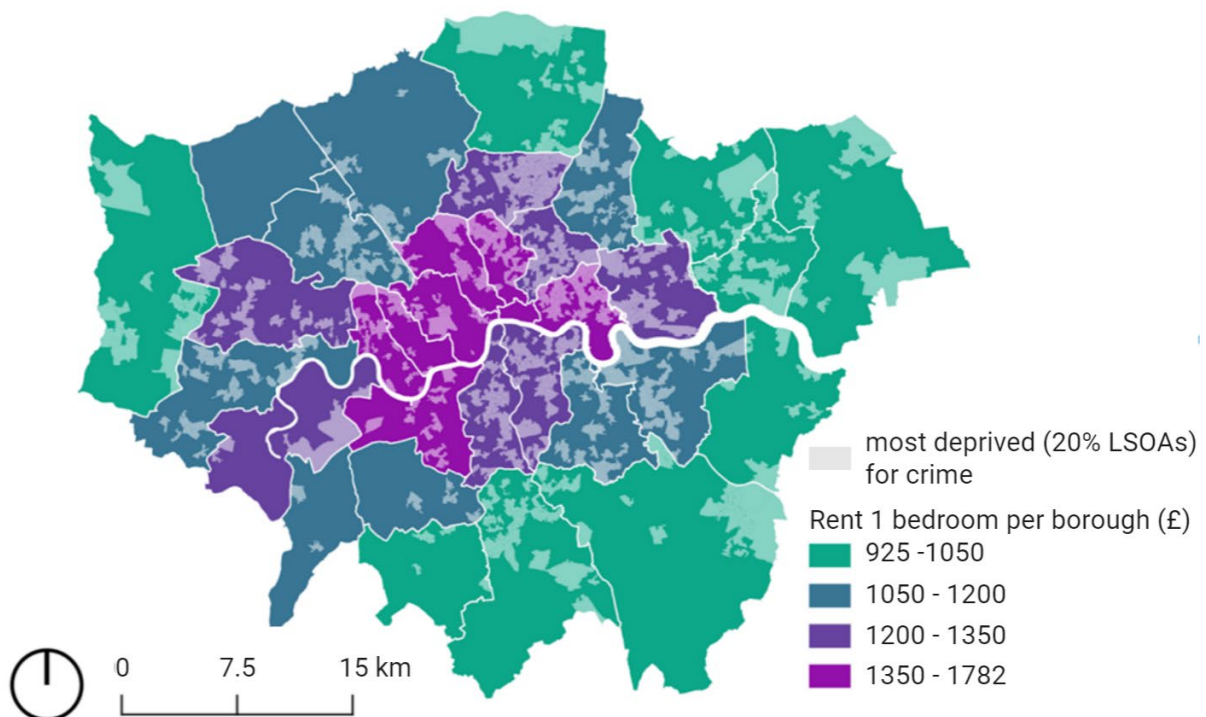


Fig. 14: Monthly rent intervals for one bedroom per borough in London (GLA, 2022), with the most deprived areas (20%) for crime (MHCLG, 2019) (Overlay: Author, 2022).

Therefore, all these variables should be taken into account. Suppose LHAs have a bit of control of supply and demand. In that case, they could dictate together with the planning department how many affordable units are needed and if the prices

are reasonable for the area, meaning the intervention of the government in the economy and relying on housing associations to provide public and affordable housing (Minton, 2017; Manzi and Morrison, 2018) as well as refugees.

The classic solution of social housing investment (Glaesler, 2011; Bone, 2014; Madden and Marcuse, 2016) looks utopian by observing the slow improvements in all those years in homelessness pieces of legislation, the considerable progress of the private marketing together with the indifference of the state (Fig.15). The argument that would justify a change would be comparing numbers. Hence, Barton and Wilson (2022) attested:

‘Councils could save £572 million a year if they were able to use social rented housing for the 73,700 lettings they currently use in the private rented sector for households at risk of homelessness’ (2022, p.18).

‘The savings in benefit and temporary accommodation costs could offset the cost of building more social rented homes’ (2022, p.18)

‘Moving each family in temporary accommodation and into social rented accommodation saves about £7,760 per year’ (2022, p.18)

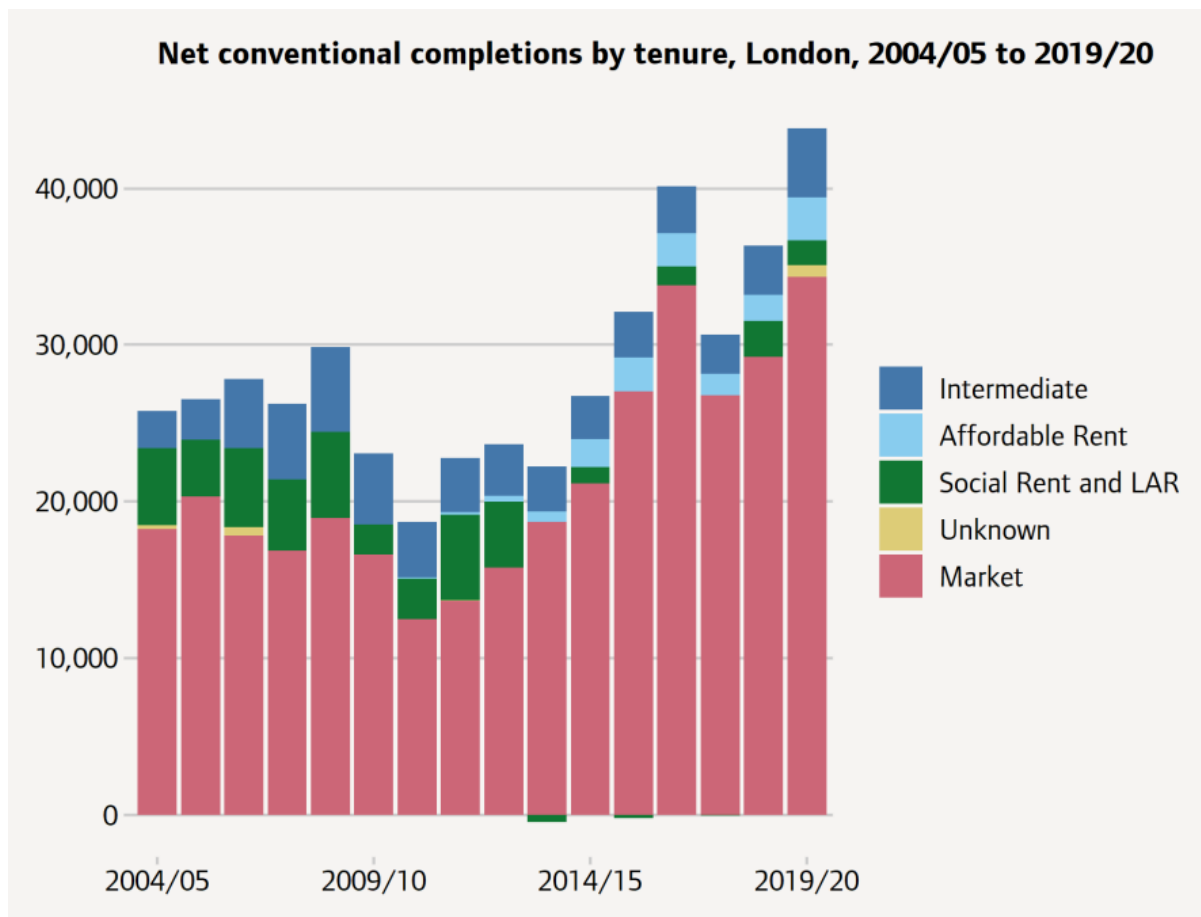


Fig. 15: Net residential conventional completions by tenure in London 2004/05 to 2019/20 (GLA, 2021).

However, the data presented (Fig.16) still shows the private market's advancement. One of the causes concluded by Garvie's (2020) investigations is the use of social housing shortage excuse to encourage the TA market as private providers act as brokers between the council and private investors. The significant profit margin is why spotting so many homeless in private TA is possible. (Fig.16)

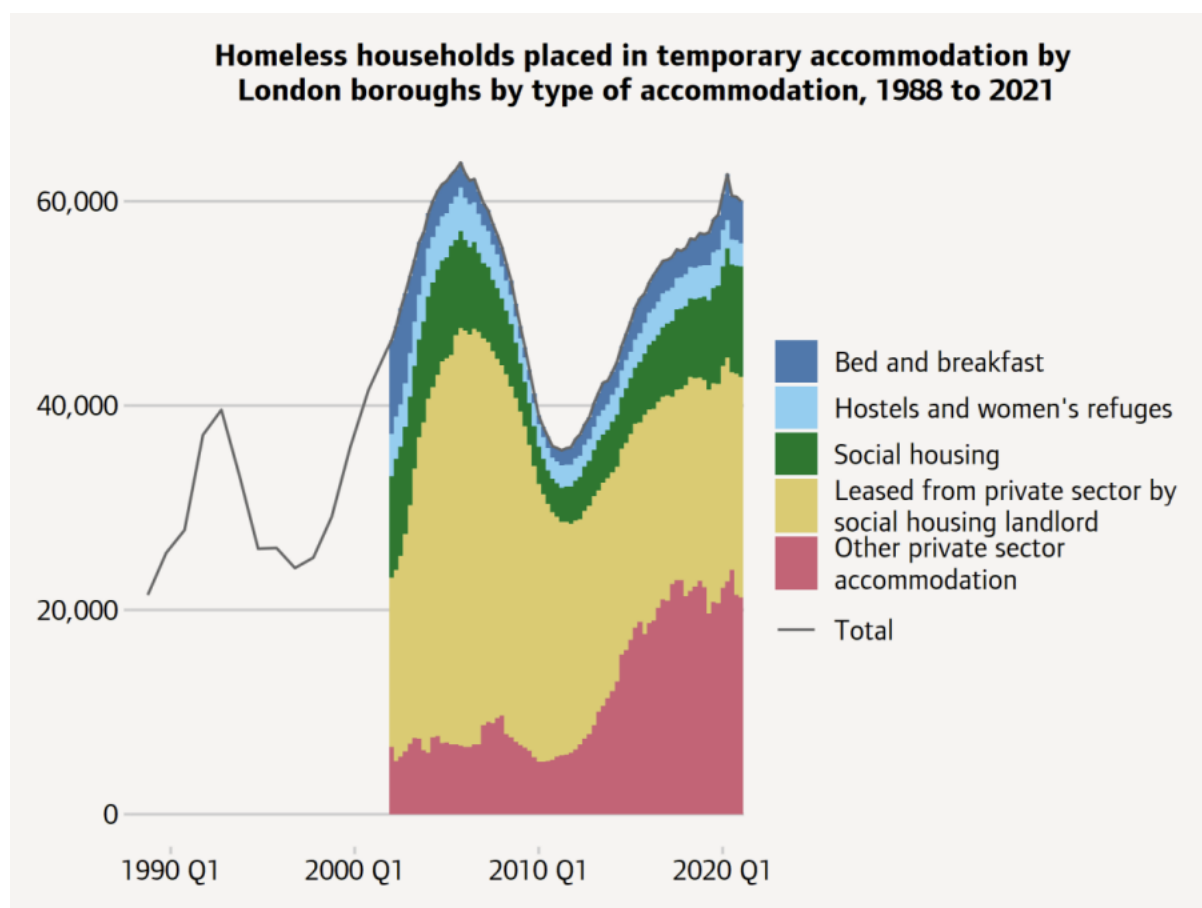


Fig. 16: Homeless Households placed in TA by London boroughs by type of accommodation between 1988 and 2021 (GLA, 2021).

Despite the revelation, social housing has not been a choice to count regardless of numerous alternatives to fight commodification brought by scholars (Glaesler, 2011; Bone, 2014; Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Instead, the private market tries to take advantages in all conditions. The availability of short or long-term rooms, like those available on the Spare Room (Fig.12) website even though it is inadequate housing, not all rooms are part of HMOs¹⁶. However, it is still an option. The so-called HMOs are recognised by the Housing Act 1996, and Article 4 Direction in 2010 was launched

¹⁶ Housing of Multiple Occupations are buildings or part of a building (flat) occupied by more than one household or three or more unrelated people, and at least one of the households shares or lacks access to a basic amenity like kitchen, bathrooms and toilets whilst having their bedroom. The tenants must use the building as their primary residence, and the accommodation is only for residential use (Government of England and Wales, 2004).

to regulate these properties to keep them safe and protect the community from the impact that might cause (Bingham, 2018; Brookfield, 2022). This legal measure only becomes statutory if a LA chooses to implement it, meaning that few licenses will be available, and the prices will be higher in these boroughs. Consequently, it is another exclusionary social policy proposed with good intention (Harvey, 1973; Fainstein, 1996; Yiftachel, 1998; Bingham, 2018).

Another distress is that many landlords do not allow children in their properties. Although the struggle to find pet-friendly properties is not new and comprehensive at some point, regardless of clauses agreed on the contract, it is disappointing to witness the regression of tenancy requirements. According to Peachey (2019), thirty-five per cent of homes rented privately have more children than in the social sector. In addition, the reporter also raises that not allowing children mean fewer units for women, suggesting discrimination. In defence, landlords argue that there are units not suitable for children.

One solution studied by Clarke and Wydall (2013) is to rehouse the perpetrator in case of DV and, under certain circumstances, bring the survivors back to their home with the argument that the offender is who must be punished. For that reason, the victims will not need to go through the re-traumatising process of finding a long-stay accommodation. Although the idea makes sense and is fair, legal tools are not strong enough to protect them from the abuser in the long term.

On the other hand, ending homeless caused by DV also means tackling DV, other forms of inequality and isolation. As it is seen as a multi-agency action (Clarke and Wydall, 2013) in an urgent and risky homeless situation, similarly it is the case of fighting DV: wider housing and welfare policies (Garvie, 2018, p.17), improvements in

the criminal justice system and statutory bodies quality of services increasing the funding to private organisations and promoting gender equality.

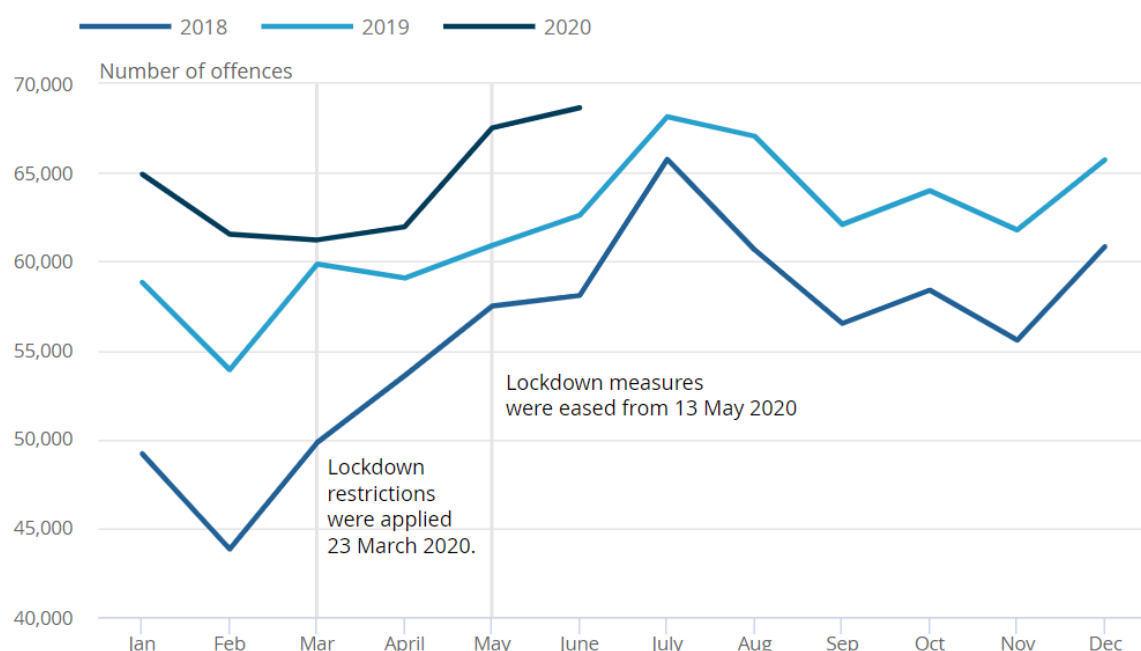


Fig.17: Total number of offences (excluding fraud) flagged as DA-related by month (ONS, 2020).

With more women in need of help (Fig. 17), fewer alternatives available for housing or TA (even in the private sector), the continuous rise in rent disproportional to the wage increase and insufficient housing benefits (Minton, 2017), survivors of DV are being pushed to poverty.

“In the past housing benefit covered the rent for those who couldn’t afford to pay because they were out of work or on low incomes. That is no longer the case. Today the housing benefit is calculated according to a fiendishly complicated market-based formula called Local Housing Allowance. Introduced in 2018, that allowance is now often too low to cover rising rents and so people are being moves out of London - and other ‘higher value’ places around the country” (Minton, 2017, p. 142)

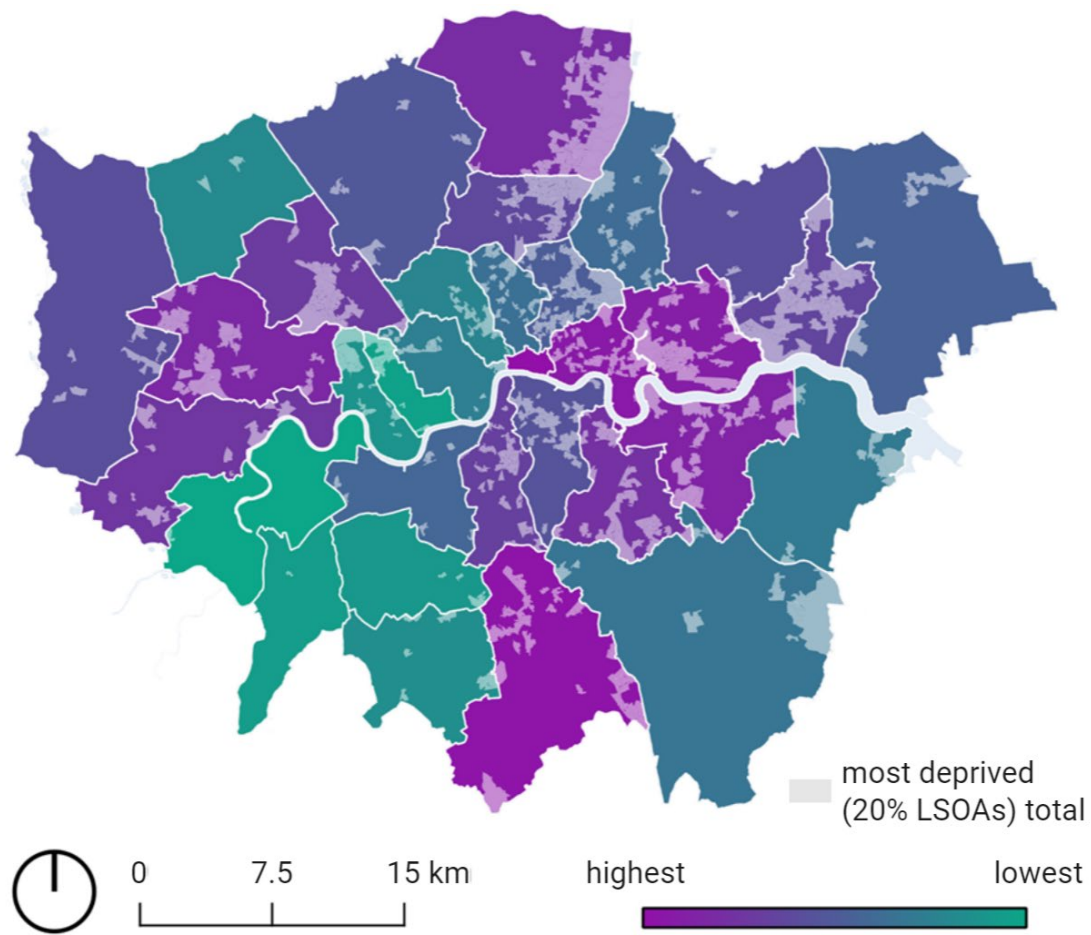


Fig.18: Volume of DA offences in London (GLA, 2022) combined with Indices of Multiple Deprivation - Total (MHCLG, 2019) (Overlay: Author, 2022)

Fig.18 illustrates the latest data on the volume of DA offences recorded (under-reported), and the highest numbers manifested not only in less wealthy boroughs, reinforcing that any women and children can experience DV. Through the combination of both information, I would like to raise attention to the additional vulnerable risk of violence from strangers. However, I understand the difficulties in jumping to conclusions as the data on DV and VAWG are inaccurate. Still, I would like to see how these figures will change in the future since more people are moving outside the boroughs and London. In Fig.19, I summarised the partial navigation of survivors to access accommodation explaining that more distance from the perpetrator means

more possibility to escape DV by accessing the actors and spaces involved. Nevertheless, going through the stages, nothing is guaranteed.

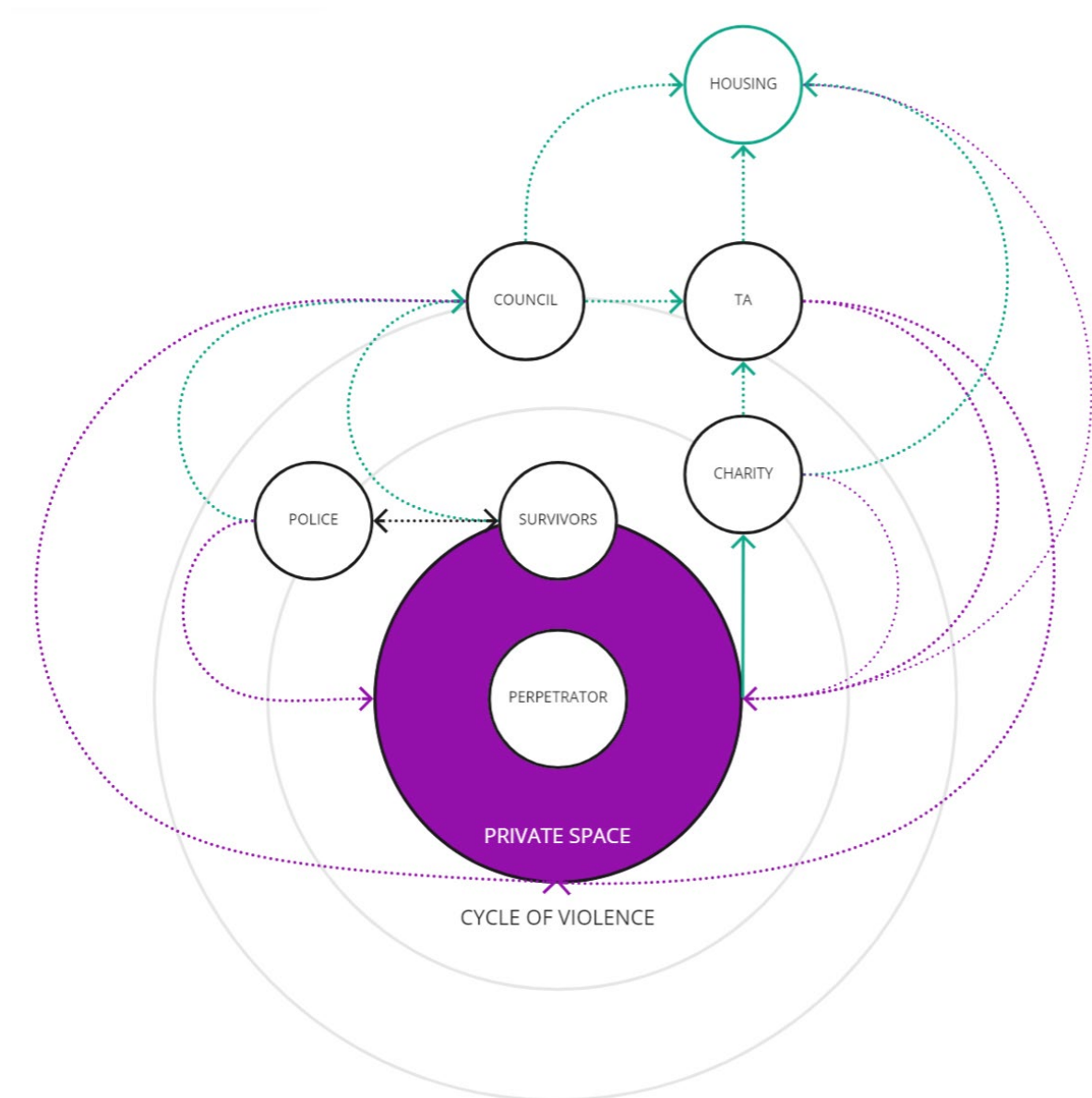


Fig. 19: Diagram showing the possibilities of escaping DV. The purple lines indicate the possibility of returning to the cycle of violence and homelessness, and the green indicates the opposite. The arrows designate the direction of movements of survivors (Author, 2022)

4.4 Feminist activism for housing

Two feminist activist groups firmly bring attention to housing rights: Focus E15 and Sisters Uncut. They were created in a tight timeline, 2013 and 2014, respectively. In the shrinking and constant scenario, intimate and structural violence and the financialisation of the urban space enclose safe alternatives for survivors. Raising awareness and protesting can be the only choice.

Focus E15 is a group of twenty-nine mothers who were threatened with eviction from a hostel in East London as the Newham Council had cut funding in 2013. The initiative started with two of them writing a petition to avoid the eviction. After one of them received a threat that if she could not find anywhere else to live until the deadline, the only alternative was to live very far from the location, which meant losing her support network. Unsatisfied, they temporarily occupied an empty block of flats on the Carpenters Estate, in Stratford, as a protest against the estate regeneration proposals for two weeks and got the media attention. Consequently, all of them were rehoused in the same borough. Their campaign still resists and grows daily as the councils continue the process of social cleansing through gentrified redevelopment methods (Minton, 2017; Kern, 2020).

This example of activism shows that, in practice, as Knowledge Management Officer revealed in the interview, some of the housing authorities are not offering the best choices for vulnerable people (among the group, there were pregnant women). Instead, it is easy to take advantage of the new projects or, in the case of Stratford, the Olympic Games that used and are still using it to catalyse developments and bring 'new people' to the borough. Following this phenomenon of people being pushed to the margins, the transport charging system is another barrier to accessing previous

jobs as it became more expensive to travel long distances. Despite affordable rent, increasing time, distance, and losing the support network and services are not unaccepted enough.

Sisters Uncut was founded in 2014 by DV service workers and survivors from East London due to local funding cuts dedicated to the cause they were already fighting (Fig. 20). According to Bowstead (2015b) and Barge (2017), DV services are usually affected by local funding cuts for two reasons: women's refuges are non-statutory services for many local authorities and there is lack of data on women accessing DV services and refuges since they often travel to access services. Sisters Uncut intersectional activism works in community organising (internal) and collective action (external). Regarding the last one, the public protests approach using space to contest austerity, including squatting buildings, against urban privatisation and gendered spatial relations. It indicates 'a return to original tactics in British activism against domestic violence' (Barge, 2017, p.11) and a way to claim their right to the city (Rolnik, 2014).

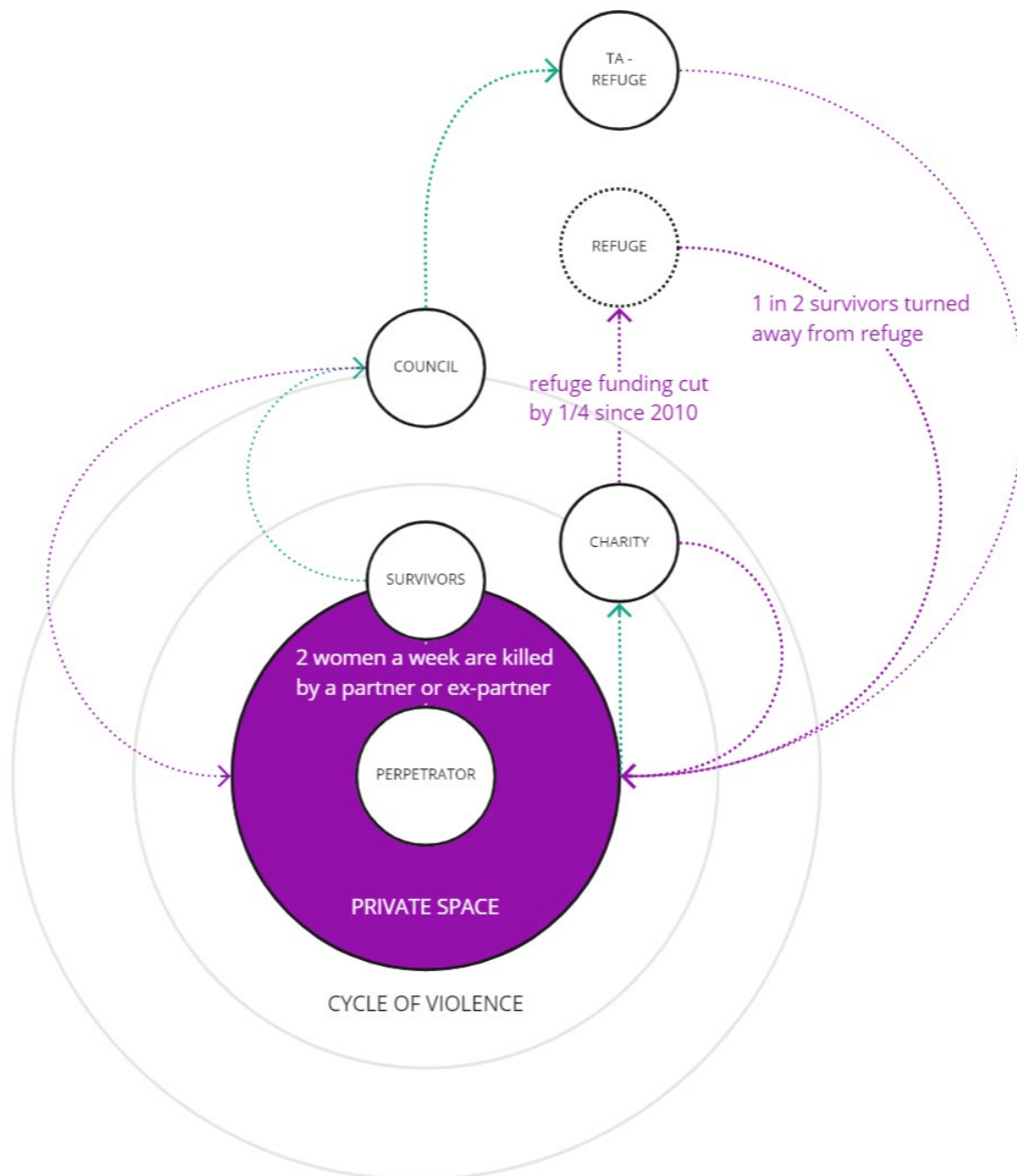


Fig. 20: Diagram with primary data from Sisters Uncut (no date) website showing the strengthened cycle of violence on survivors fleeing DV (Author, 2022).

Similarly, the ideological division of public and private can also be seen in the relationship between government and public properties and the private market (Brodie, 1995, cited in Barge, 2017) that materialise in the urban space. Therefore fighting DV, which often happens in the private space, is not only contesting the criminal system

but also the access to safety, including public spaces and housing (Valentine, 1989; Rolnik, 2014, p.294). Hence, it challenges the neoliberal austerity logic of the housing market and the 'non-regulatory' responsibility of local governments in funding cuts and terrible housing referral services.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research showed an overview of the main housing and homeless regulations changes and their negative impacts in practice. It has been a long fight against local councils for the homeless or people who threatened to be homeless to access good services, benefits and TA. Therefore, displacement is not only caused by the increasing forces of the private market and the shrinking of social housing, but the way local authorities enforce it promotes social cleansing.

Poor women fleeing violence are less likely to escape the cycle of violence and homeless unless their basic needs are covered by the state and supported by a multi-agency action. With cuts in DV services and refuges, housing benefits and limited access to universal credit, these families escaping violence have fewer options available. Unfortunately, the right to the city is restricted to the fringes and outside of London except if they organise collectively. Still, this would be rare when women are already traumatised and isolated. Considering the current scenario, a unique transport fare in London would alleviate financially these women and families who have been rehoused away from their workplace and better job opportunities.

In order to argue against funding cuts and accurately understand the supply and demand of housing across the boroughs, better quantitative and qualitative data

collection on survivors of DV should be done. Considering the charities' limitations, I reckon they could work together to meet this target.

If public and private sectors are working together to fulfil their interests, as stated by one of the participants (housing associations in partnership with private developers) it would be easier, in theory, to regulate the supply of affordable homes as well as refuge provision across LAs under planning regulations. Additionally, conditions pre-established in law by each council for new developments would protect families from displacement and collect funds required to reinvest in local services and subsidies for housing. A further study on housing associations and partnerships would be needed to investigate how they provide affordable homes, how to keep them affordable once the market prices are volatile and what is the future of refuges.

Organisations work on their maximum capacity giving support to survivors, intermediating DV survivors and LHA with some providing refuges. Nevertheless, regardless of the significance, it is not an action that challenges the system that reproduces institutional violence or the patriarchal system.

A feminist and intersectional perspective in planning (Crenshaw, 1991 and Frisch, 2015 cited in Beebeejaun, 2017; Kern, 2020), governance, housing and design (McIlwaine, 2013; Morrow, Oona and Parker, 2020) are key to preventing gender-based violence, the help of support services nearby and to enable the creation of a support network. Additionally, considering people are different and they cope and suffer different forms of violence, it is vital to supply a variety of refuges. In all, I suggest exploring how we could imagine an ideal refuge in terms of design. Abrahams's (2007) work already gives some ideas about spatial programmes.

Unquestionably, the quality of local housing authorities' services and other institutions involved in fighting DV must improve with training and enforced by an auditing organisation. According to the code, local authorities can use their powers to tackle empty homes. They can give some financial recompense to initiatives bringing these homes back into use or charge up to 150 per cent of the council tax value for a property empty for over two years. I believe further impositions like the possibility of losing the property title for the council could work similarly to the guiding principle of the social function of property in Brazil. Consequently, all assets must be used in the society's interests apart from the owner's.

Finally, the consequences of housing austerity and the cycle of violence (DV, VAWG, structural violence and violence in general) will continue and become usual in the next generations as children are massively targeted as inequalities increase. It is time to pressure the institutions against neoliberal practices, patriarchy and housing injustice.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Consent Form

Fleeing domestic violence and finding refuge in London: informal politics and activist responses (With the development of this research, I discovered the focus would not be the access to refuge but on understanding the complexity of options and barriers in the homeless system for survivors of DV, consequently the title has slightly changed)

Sociology, LSE

Dear participant,

Thanks for your interest in this project about **Fleeing domestic violence and finding refuge in London: informal politics and activist responses** (the title has slightly changed). In this email, I give you information about the project and ask for your consent to participate. If you agree, please reply to this email, stating your name and that you agree to the statements in the table below to give your consent.

What is the study about?

My research intention is to understand how space and society shape refuges, social policy and housing crisis and how it shapes the options for women and children. I would like to explore current and past legal tools used by local authorities and organisations to overcome funding cuts from the government, financialisation of spaces across the city and chronic housing shortage in the UK to provide their services continuously.

What will my involvement be?

You will be asked to take part in an interview to provide general data about refuge provision for victims of domestic violence.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is **voluntary**. There are no negative consequences for you if you decide not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part but then later on you change your mind, you can let me know by July 15th - you will not have to give any explanation why. It is also absolutely fine if you feel that you don't want to answer any specific questions – you can just tell me, and we will move on.

What will my information be used for?

These interviews are part of my independent project (master's dissertation) and the information provided might be used in future research of publications.

Will my information be anonymous?

Your participation will be anonymous - your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All digital files, transcripts and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Any hard copies of research information will be kept in locked files at all times.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found at:

https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from_serp=1

If you agree to take part in the research, please complete the section below

Your name: (type first name and surname here)

Please read these three statements. If you agree with them, put a X in the boxes below	
I have read this message and had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I agree to participate in the [interview / survey / focus group]	
I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and anonymous and that my personal information will be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the study	

Once completed please email this back to me. Thank you!

Researcher name:

Email address:

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found here:
<https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf>

7.2 Interview Questions

Preparation

I will send the consent and ethics form to local authorities and support workers that offers refuge to victims of domestic violence by email. After I receive the forms signed, we will set the best time and day to conduct the interview.

Introduction

Before the interview, I will remind them what my research is about and highlight some of the important points of the consent and ethics form.

Explain how all answers will be treated confidentially. "I will not give names of individuals, to make you feel comfortable in talking freely with me. Participation in the discussion is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer."

Interview questions

- 1) What are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?
- 2) What are the requirements to ask for a refuge?
- 3) How do you allocate these women? What distance do you consider appropriate to protect them from the perpetrator? What factors justify their destination?
- 4) How do you find houses to use as refuge?
- 5) Who usually own these properties?

6) What can the organisation or local authorities do if there is not enough room or space for the demand of women and children in need?

7) For how long these women and children can stay in the accommodation?

8) Any policies' strengths, challenges or suggestions that you would like to reinforce or make?

Closing

1. Thank people for their time and ideas, and express how helpful it has been to my research.

2. Explain next steps: These interviews will be very important to proceed to my dissertation that will be discussing this topic.

7.3 Interview Excerpts

Interview 1

Date: 07/06/2022

Participants: Author and Specialist Legal Housing Advisor

* The interview was not recorded and no quotes from this interview were used in this paper. However notes were taken

1. What are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?

- Domestic Abuse Act;
- Housing Act 1996;
- Homeless Reduction Act 1997;
- Regulations (not strict): The Homelessness Code of Guidance (Chap.21);

2. What are the requirements to ask for a refuge?

- They need to be commissioned (funded) by authority or government;
- Make a homeless application (specific cases include refuges);

- It should be reasonable to consider religion, cultural, language and location.

3. How do you allocate these women? What distance do you consider appropriate to protect them from the perpetrator? What factors justify their destination?

- Answers are in the previous question;
- They shouldn't be placed in the same borough and others that might be dangerous, it should be considered case by case.

4) How do you find houses to use as refuge?

- Every organisation can sort it out;
- Considering the Hazards law;
- Other requirements like: if there is going to accept children, it should guarantee access to greenspaces and schools;

5) Who usually owns these properties?

- The refuges are owned by local authorities or housing associations;
- Some Refuge organisations have a long-term process of leasehold.

6) What can the organisation or local authorities do if there is not enough room or space for the demand of women and children in need?

- Contact NGOs with spaces available;
- B&Bs are easier, usually the first alternative.
- B&B and hostels are managed by local authorities, mostly owned by the council

7) For how long these women and children can stay in the accommodation?

- For B&B and hostels is recommended for the women stay for 6 weeks (maximum)
- For refuges it depends.

8) Any policies' strengths, challenges or suggestions that you would like to reinforce or make?

- Housing authorities should not waste time;
- More prone to pick up cases;
- Refer to social services directly;
- Eligibility and Homeless application.

- Break the cycle through advocating for exclusive women accommodation due to trauma and stress;

9) In case of transgender women sharing the spaces with other women in a refuge space, what are your thoughts?

- They should be in self-contained accommodations;
- Not sharing the bedroom nad toilet;
- Other women sharing the social spaces of the refuge shouldn't be transphobic or very old.

10) But wouldn't this be unfair to other women? They might feel they have less "privilege" if they have to share the same facilities while trans-women have their own private space.

- They would. But these trans-women must feel safe;
- It is what we called positive discrimination, it's the same when there is an elevator because someone accessing the building is disabled.

Interview 2

Date: 08/06/2022

Participants: Author (RE) and Knowledge Management Officer (KMO)

KMO: Yes. So, I currently work for [an organisation] as a [Knowledge Management Officer]. [redacted]. So that's, that's more what I'm doing now, at the previously I was working in [another organisation], that is a focused organization, on helping women particularly from [redacted] backgrounds to escape domestic violence, [redacted]. So I would help the team kind of keep the digital archive, up to date, because that would be what was used to evidence, what work had been done for statistical purposes for our funders and stuff. But also for our internal reflections. So for ourselves review of where things could improve and stuff like that, because there'd be, you know, like outcome surveys with the women living in the refuges and stuff like that. So that would give an indication of, you know, how well they're doing, you know, and whether (...) whether our support and our intervention is helping her which, (...) the outcomes that we hope for her, you know, so as an organisation, it had decided to this prototype me arriving, but it had decided, what were the key outcomes that they wanted to say, we as an organization want these outcomes for the women that come here. And one, you know, the key (...) key things is that she feels safe, that the children feel safe. They feel that they know what their rights are, they know how to ask for help, etc, etc. So my position was much more kind of overview, you know. So from that perspective, that's, that's all I can tell you. But, you know, I do have some thoughts on policy and practice. So, you know, if I can't answer your questions, I will if I can't, I'll let you know.

RE: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. No worries. It's, um, yeah, this one is a tough one. What are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?

KMO: What are the most important housing policies that help protect women?

RE: Yeah, kind of guide for women fleeing violence, like how to find out (...) how they find this emergency housing. There's a (...) they think there's (...) there are some policies that guide them, or local authorities or the organisations.

KMO: Right, um, with regards to the specific kinds of laws? I don't know, you know. I think in terms of sort of sector, practice, the key. And so what's the question in?

RE: Yeah, what is it specifically about the housing policies?

KMO: Yeah.

RE: (...) That guarantee emergency housing for women.

KMO: That guarantee emergency housing, housing policies, housing policies set by who?

RE: Yeah, I mean, government.

KMO: Yeah. Okay. So yeah, local authority housing policies that guarantee I don't know. But I will say that in practice, they don't tend to stick to whatever policy they have. You know, I'll can go into that more detail if you'd like but if there's well, okay, so for example, prior to Brexit, as in the legal exile of of the UK from from the European Union. It wasn't that set in law. So I However, you what we saw was a few local authorities just dismiss EU passport holding victims of domestic violence as not eligible anymore, because they were EU nationals. However, that had not been made law by then, you know. So one thing I have found is that policy and practice are few and far between, you know, so housing policies that should ensure and guarantee, you know, in that emergency housing Well, one of them is ring fencing funding for, for, for for the services, particularly ethnic minority led services. Because another thing that I (...) we noticed where not only were women who are foreign, kind of be misguided at, at the, say, the local authorities reception desk or whatever. So they'll go in, and then we've been misguided on or, you know, not told correctly, what their rights are, what their pathway is. Then, on the other side of things, if they go to a generic kind of domestic violence organisation that doesn't speak their language, or isn't understanding of their culture, sometimes that they would feel microaggressions in in that setting, as well as (...) Yeah, just not feeling completely safe. In those settings, either. So ring fencing, housing policies that would guarantee, you know, support for emergency housing or would support emergency housing services would be ring fencing money, to make sure that these particular services, you know, are, are kept safe, you know, that, that money, money is always guaranteed for that. Adversely, I think over monitoring and over, kind of setting too many targets and kind of micromanaging the statistics of, of small organizations is incredibly difficult and onerous to the people working. So that is something that could be improved in terms of their policy. Yeah, that's all I can say about that.

RE: That's okay. And when we talk about emergency housing, we are not actually including refuge, because refuge for women, they contain other support services. So it's a bit different.

KMO: And so what do you mean emergency housing? Do you mean like temporary accommodation?

RE: Yeah. Like hostels.

KMO: Yeah, Ring ring fence, the money, you know, like, the since 2012, that there's been the look, I forgotten the name now, the [Localism] Act. Was that, yeah. By the coalition government. They, they cut into a lot of the local authorities autonomy and ring fencing of key community services, you know, and one of the key things that got the biggest hit was emergency housing and services for the homeless, you know, so, obviously victims of DV who flee their, their abusive home are automatically homeless, you know, so, emergency housing is absolutely fundamental to ensure you know, the safety of these women and their children, you know, but unfortunately, that that has been cut too so. Yeah, I wouldn't be able to tell you what policy currently guarantees it, but it should. Yeah, it's (...) it's what's (...) so what's the word? Is kind of mutable, depending on the government. And that's not correct. You know?

RE: Yeah, I mean, if you're considering the increasing price of private accommodations, we have the lack of affordable housing, and everything like we're in a dead end. We're close to that. Right?

KMO: Absolutely. Yeah.

RE: I Um, yeah. So the second question is, what are the requirements to ask for refuge? If you know.

KMO: what all the requirements to what?

RE: To ask for a refuge.

KMO: Oh. At the moment, you have to have British citizenship, you know? Or what is it the DV, something that forgotten the name, but like, when the home office kind of allows you to have it? [It VA?], I think it's when the home office kind of signs off that, even if you're not a British citizen, that you have the right to access benefits to access money, because you are fleeing domestic violence. So the there's those protections in place for the moment, but you have to be able to, to get that first. Yeah. Other than that, you need to be a British citizen. And that's, that's it, you know, like, at the to know, well, you know, you have to have, you know, be fleeing from the situation, you know, what I understand it can be it, there's a difference between, like, I left this person two years ago, you know, and I'm finding it difficult to survive and cope to (...) I am leaving this person right now, you know, so that, that, that gives you a different type of service. But yeah, you would have to just state that you are in danger, have access to benefits in this country. And that's it, you know, however, if you're an immigrant, that is very difficult to ask because you have to wait for you have to apply for your specialist visa. And then once you get it, that, there's another way to confirm it, and then you can start your benefits, but with Universal Credit,

there's a 15 week wait, so it's a very long time before you actually receive the money. And unfortunately, you know, every single refuge particularly is, you know, working on a stretch budget and cannot afford to kind of, you know, every room has to be rented for. So it has to be covered by either the, maybe the woman herself will be able to pay the rent, or have access to the benefits to be able to, for it to be covered with housing benefit. So money's an issue. Yeah.

RE: Yeah, I see. Yeah. Then you also have to prove that you are a victim of domestic violence?

KMO: Well, it depends on the organization, you know, like who you prove into? Are you proving to the police? Are you proving to the court? Are you proving to this organisation, most organisations believe the victim. Well, that's, you know, like, that's, you go once, you know, the frontline worker, deals with the person and talks with them their story, then it's quite obvious what the person is going through, you know, it's very hard to lie about that, especially to inexperienced frontline advisor, like, they'll pick that up straight away, but very few people do. You know, and I think, yeah, they're there (...) The thing is, is that the, it's not a, it's not a luxurious process, let's say, you're leaving your home, and your stability and everything that you fundamentally know, to be your life, you know, and you're jumping into this, you know, crazy house, with all the victims and their children, and you're in the hands of an organisation, you know, that's taken care of you. And then suddenly, you know, the police, the council, the institutions, the schools, the doctors, all of these things that get changed. So it is not a fun and easy process that people just go on to kind of claim some free housing, you know, as, as is the kind of prejudice I guess, you know, it's like, in terms of proving to the organisation that supporting you. I would say there's not much proof needed, you know, all they'll do is support you and help you in getting to safety, you know?

RE: Yeah, that's interesting. I mean, coming from organisation point of view. But, uh, yeah, what I read in the regulations is that you have to prove yourself, for local authorities, because you're gonna look for the housing, housing officer first, and then they're going to send you to another organisation or to say, Oh, we have a place where we don't have place.

KMO: So Well, the thing is, you can self refer yourself to the organisation first, yeah, that would be the better way to do it. Because, you know, I wouldn't recommend going to the council as a victim in that position, because of the way the institution treats people. Like, it's just not, I would say, it's not mentally safe, you know, like, really not mentally safe. So I (...) a few people have kind of gone the other way and, you know, asked for advice and help and support from all from specialists, organisations to then be able to, with the caseworker, talk to the housing officer, you know, and walk forward the process, you know, with, with somebody by your side who understand the lay of the land, you know, a lot better.

RE: But do you think that these organizations, they need to work together with the local council, there needs to be (...) it needs to have some connection kind of thing?

KMO: Absolutely, of course, it does, yeah. Because at the end of the day, the council, the local authority, that will have the duty of care for this person will eventually move them on whether it's going to be whether they say, you know, get a

private flat, or, and we'll give you some deposit, because that's part of one of the council's schemes to kind of rush people onto private property and not not have them on to council property. Or whether you're extremely lucky and you get council property, you know, the person (...) that the institution that's dealing with the property kind of scenario is, is the council however, again, it entirely depends on the woman, she can be a completely free agent and have, you know, her own means, as it were, and what she needed was somewhere to escape some support to find new housing. And she'll, she'll sort herself out these things do happen, you know, it's rare, though, because it is such a kind of traumatic thing to do. You know, it usually does require, you know, the support of the state to find her a new a new house. However, the current policy is, you know, there isn't any housing stock anymore, it's shrunk so much. And there's these I forgot what is called it, but were there like these schemes, where it's like, you know, you can (...) we have a list of trusted landlords, and we will pay the deposit for you, you know, and this is, this will be a stable place for you to be, to stay for at least a year, you know? And, yeah, they're not, they're not very well, kind of, what's the word kind of scrutinized? You know, and it is definitely a kind of conveyor belt mechanism to move people out of social housing, or away from social housing, so that they no longer have that duty of care. They also do this not only by doing that to people and placing them within the borough, they'll place them outside of the borough, so then suddenly, it's like, you're outside the borough, and you're not no longer a problem, you know.

RE: So yeah, actually, according to the regulations, the council needs to find accommodation for these women outside the borough, they are living at the moment, and you should be in a borough that has no connections. Otherwise perpetrator could be, find her.

KMO: Yeah, yeah, it depends. It depends case by case, you know, because, like, it could be that he's actually somewhere else, you know, and her friends and family and entire kind of connection is in this borough kind of thing. All the schools or whatever, you know, but yes, that is true, they do have to move them to another borough, but it has to be done with care and has to be done with the understanding that the other borough is now, you know, on not take takes care of (...) but knows that they're there? You know? And yeah, it depends on the criminal history of the abuser, you know, like, sometimes the police are heavily involved in this, like, if it's a case that has to go to the MOPAC or MARAC, MARAC, that if it's the case that has to go to MARAC, its extreme abuse, and this person is is quite dangerous, you know, perhaps they're part of a, you know, well known gang, or, you know, the, they're known to police as, you know, an aggressive and, and dangerous person, you know, then (...) then there's extra steps there, there is extra steps to help the woman get to a safe place, you know?

RE: How do you find houses to use as a refuge?

KMO: As opposed to?

RE: Yeah, to use as a refuge like [organisation x]. At the beginning, when I was working there, there was only one refuge, and now they have [more]. So I don't know, maybe, you know, how they find it, how did they find these places, if they found through a local authority.

KMO: Oh, yeah. So it was through the Housing Association. So [the housing association], is the housing association that I think is the landlord of the first refuge. And what they did was, I think they managed to convince and, you know, positively show that the importance of managing more than one house, you know, we're very lucky to get it, but the only thing is, is when you're a small organization, and you expand so quickly, as in, you expand your responsibilities so quickly, and yet you haven't expanded, say, your staff as quickly, you know, and maybe perhaps, manage (...) the managerial staff needs more training, and how to support and develop the employees that they have with them, you know, then it can create a little bit of chaos, let's say, so, that, that's one of the things where it's just like, it's, it plays, a plays a part in, in just growing, but with careful planning, you know, I was gonna say, but yeah, they, they got it straight from [the housing association]. So Housing Association, that was the that was a way through.

RE: Yeah, that's good. Who usually own these properties? So yeah, you've answer me. What can the organisation or local authorities do if there is not enough room or a space for the demand of women and children in need?

KMO: What kind of organizations?

RE: No what can they do?

KMO: What can they do? What can local authorities do?

RE: No, an organisation if they don't have these spaces available?

KMO: Yeah, there's no space available. So I understand that there's like, there's like a platform, you know, like, refuge platform space for all those that work in in frontline refuges. So I think there is there is a case of like, then sort of signposting and finding out if there, if there's a space available in another organization, you know.

RE: Like a spare room?

KMO: It happens sometimes, you know, like, if [one organisation] is like, we have x empty rooms, you know, then it's like, for example, the refuge manager would tell the advisors first, and the the advisors at [this organization] would be able to put some clients forward. If that was the situation and if there wasn't any clients to put forward at that point. Then say the refuge manager would open it up and in this portal. I don't know what the portal is called, or what the rules are. Sorry, but (...). That's what I understood what would happen.

RE: Okay, that would be interesting to find out. For how long these women and children can stay in accommodation?

KMO: From what I understand it can be well, can be as long as you need. You know, I think it's up to each organization that decides what what their policy is? You know? I think it (...) Yeah, it entirely depends. I would say that, for example, [one organisation] would have a policy of, you know, trying trying to move women on. You know, for maximum, like, six to nine months, you know, which is that I've, I was supporting and working with [a project], as well as database manager, and I saw

people staying there for two to three years. You know, so I don't know is the answer, because it seems to me that each organization has their own policy with this.

RE: Okay. And final question. Do you know anyone I could interview like these refuge managers that you just told me, if you know anyone.

KMO: You (...) have you talked to [name], and everybody else at [organisation x]?

[redacted]

RE: maybe someone at [organisation y]?

KMO: Um, the thing is, it becomes an issue of that being too many people, because we're talking about they don't, they don't necessarily they don't. I don't think they house anybody, you know, and if anything, there are very, very small local projects that are working on that. But it's mostly advice. And it's mostly support. It is not housing, you know, they don't provide actual housing. So don't like they would be able to answer your questions in theory. But they don't practice it. You know, they give advice. So they'd be the best person to speak to, because they're like, they actually train local authorities on the law. You know.

RE: Oh, that's interesting.

KMO: I was shocked, because I was like, why is (..) Why is up to a charity to educate the local authority. You know, like, I thought that was shocking. And on top of that, it's up to whichever local authority wants to get the training, you know, so it's not even all local authorities. So it's not like all local authorities are getting the same standard of quality training you know, like it's yeah it's shocking It really pisses me off. But then at the other side of that I decided to not be so angry because it was like local authorities getting training from [organisation y] and that's, that's a positive thing I suppose you know, but it does it does denote the state of things you know, like Jesus Christ. Yeah, I also look I'll be honest, the advisors at [organisation y] the people who probably don't see you are hell as busy, you know, like, they are swamped with work. Yeah, I, if you pass me your like, details of the project, I can forward it to some policy people in [organisation y], because they might (...) might have a bit more capacity. And they'll get in touch with you if they can. Yeah.

RE: Thank you. Thank you for participating in this study, I really appreciate it.

KMO: No problem at all, I hope I helped you in some way.

RE: Sure you did! Thank you again. Bye!

KMO: Bye, take care.

Interview 3

Date: 13/06/2022

Participants: Author (RE) and Referral and Advice Line Worker (RALW)

* It was not possible to schedule an interview however, the participant answered my questions by e-mail instead.

4. What are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?

I believe that the most important fact is that victims and survivors can start a homelessness application in any borough of their choice to flee. Also that they can access emergency accommodation without having "evidence" as a first instance as domestic abuse is a strong enough reason to flee.

2) What are the requirements to ask for a refuge?

Experiencing domestic abuse and or being at risk. Each refuge is different and have different requirements. There are some that accept No Recourse to Public Funds but those are rare to find. Essentially, they need funding, be housing benefits or be social services.

Yet, where I work the manager would not accept someone who is not at risk of violence just because she has pressure to "fill the beds". When we get a referral from a different refuge for a lady that is not at risk of violence, they just want to move because they want to be in London, she does not accept the referral. She explains the person needs housing support, not refuge support.

3) How do you allocate these women? What distance do you consider appropriate to protect them from the perpetrator? What factors justify their destination?

It is not a straight forward answer. There are many variables. At times we can accept women from the area into the refuge. Some women are being abused because perpetrators want them out of the home but will not actively seek the woman. We would accept someone from the same area on those occasions.

There is also the question of whether perpetrator knows someone in the area, we would not house a woman where a perpetrators uncle lives down the road.

There is women that would also explain perpetrators are very active in within their community so they rather not being in London as there is more chance of bumping into people from their community.

4) How do you find houses to use as refuge?

We have 5 refuges in our area. Some of those are from our organization and some belong to a housing association. I am unaware of how those are found, where I worked before the director explained it was through a friendship she had with a manager within a housing association.

5) Who usually owns these properties?

Housing associations.

- 6) What can the organisation or local authorities do if there is not enough room or space for the demand of women and children in need?

Women would most likely be sent to a different area. It is about keeping them safe. Yet, if there is no refuge then it could be that there is emergency and or temporary accommodations as well. Depending on the need social services can fund emergency accommodation too.

- 7) For how long these women and children can stay in the accommodation?

There is no maximum. We often tell them is about a 6-months to a year. We do not throw them on the streets but they should be relatively safe by the time they leave and should have a housing plan from the start.

- 8) Any policies' strengths, challenges or suggestions that you would like to reinforce or make?

A challenge that we face is often with housing departments instead of refuges. Women tend to be brushed to the side by councils, I often tell them to go in person instead of calling as they find it harder to get rid of the woman. It is not fair that they are experiencing violence from a partner then have to be fighting for their right too.

I think policies changed following brexit too, making it more difficult for people to access Housing Benefit which has an impact on victims and survivors.

Interview 4

Date: 08/07/2022

Participants: Author (RE) and Research and Policy Coordinator (RPC)

RE: Thank you for taking part in this research. I am investigating the steps women take to access DV refuges in London. How have you been? Are you finishing your PhD programme?

RPC: I'm good. Yes, I'm finishing it this year. I have everything written, I just need to edit it.

RE: I see! And I can see your research is focused on migrant women.

RPC: Yes, my research is focused on [specific group of migrant] women.

RE: I started my research on a specific group, but I realised the service is not good for all women in general.

RPC: But are you studying migrant women or women in general?

RE: Women in general, but I will reinforce that there are different approaches and treatment between BAME women, non-BAME women, migrant and all the aspects

related with intersectionality. Also, there aren't enough refuges for all of them and because of that, the option is to relocate to another type of temporary accommodation, sometimes to a mixed accommodation that might reproduce the cycle of violence. So, I will ask some questions related to the current regulations and if you don't know the answer it's ok, we'll move on to the next.

RPC: Right.

RE: So, what are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?

RPC: I just feel like now I've been tested!

RE: No, not at all.

RPC: Well, I think like it's a combination. So like, there's like the [vog?] strategy, right, like, and then there's also like the Homelessness Act, all kind of like, together into like a really important kind of like pieces of legislation that like, set out, you know, like, yeah, like provision in terms of like, for people who are homeless. And within these legislation, there is like, specific things for domestic violence survivors, but they are not very specific. So I think that's the main issue because I, you know, domestic violence survivors are not always seen as vulnerable. But this is something that has changed things very recently in the Domestic Abuse Bill. So I think this is a really, really, really important piece of legislation actually, because this says that, I mean, again, like, I think I was like more kind of up to date when I was working at [organisation z] because it was more like, you know, policy and practicing. And now I'm doing a PhD so I'm not, I'm a bit like, you know, I obviously did the fieldwork, but it was a while ago, so now more kind of, like, analysing, you know, I cannot write enough but I feel like I'm actually a bit distant from like the sector and what is happening in like, at the moment, but I think the latest, you know, the most important really piece of legislation was the Domestic Abuse Bill. And then you know, like kind of overcome a bit of the issue that domestic violence survivors were not treated as priority need. You know, I think there was like the main issue in like Homelessness legislation. So yes, I would say that but then obviously so these are like legislation policies that are really important but then in practice, as you say, like it's really it's (...) it's also is this (...) we not always say like in practice because there is lack of housing (...) appropriate or housing you know, like for everyone you know, but then like specifically for people with special needs, lack of refuge you know, like get on the cycle or hire them you know, like they can actually meet. Yeah, I think I like mostly that so something else that just came to my mind but now I just just forgot. Oh, yeah, so there is another thing also like in one of, I don't know if this has changed, but I remember when we did [a report] [redacted]. One of the things that we (...) besides like a lot of women and also women with children are domestic violence survivors but also we're going to be women with children that will be put in like hostels, you know, like mixed gender hostels and it will stay in place that and stay in there for over six weeks. And there is another issue that like, it's not like a law but there is a guidance that says that they shouldn't stay there for over six weeks, but you know, they will stay so it's like as they should say (...) With the legislation itself and like, it's not, it's just often it's just a guidance. And then when is the guidance in order? There is a lot of room for like, being like discretionary. Right? So a council can always, and then (...) the (...) then with that it comes like them kind of postcode lottery there is a like, you know, like a counselor can always be like, Oh, we actually don't

have you know, more housing or more like temporary or the more appropriate forms of temporary housing. So we have to do that. Yeah, so I think the most challenging thing is actually, we have the the housing supply, you know, like, can refuge supply really, because we do (...) I think we do (...) like in the like(...) they're actually quite good. Like, if we put them all together, the policies are actually not undergrad, I think they're quite good, especially considering this latest change in terms of making domestic violence priority need. But then I don't know what is happening in practice, if actually, they have been made now that the legislation has changed. That is that the straightforward right that they have been considered prioritising it or not. I know that for a woman, obviously, a lot of woman there are domestic violence survivors, they are, they have children, so then that's more straightforward, because they have to be, you know, if they're pregnant, or children (...) have children that had to be treated as priority need, but the ones that were in the gray area were like domestic violence survivors that didn't have children, but clearly, you know, because of the trauma and or like, mental health issues and so on, they are all priority need. Yeah.

RE: Thank you. And (...) What are the requirements to ask for refuge?

RPC: Sorry?

RE: what are the requirements to ask for a refuge?

RPC: Um, so like, if you're a domestic violence survivor, and you are (...) I mean, you are made homeless, because your domestic violence survivor and all that. And also I think there's also the gray area, a lot of people don't understand. I think practitioners is also and counselors like that, if you're a domestic violence survivor, and you live with the perpetrator, or, or, or just like, you know, you're in danger, because like, you knows, your, your, your (...) how (...) he knows, he knows where you live, so it's not in on the legislation, it's like, you're not, you cannot be reasonably expected to, to live in this house, you know, like, this house is not secure. So therefore, you're already homeless. It so as a survivor, you already are homeless, even when you actually had it somewhere, you know, you have a house to live, you are homeless. So. So I guess like that's, you know, the requirement that is unsafe for you to live where you are, or that, you know, you don't have to be street homeless, but it's unsafe because of the threat to, like, to your life and be coming from like, yeah, domestic abuse? Yes, I think that would be, you know, like, there'll be the requirement. Really.

RE: And how do you allocate this women? what distance do you consider appropriate to protect them from the perpetrator? And what factors justify the destination?

RPC: Yeah, I think allocation (...) well, is really made, according to the (...) to what is available, and that's the issue because there's a lot of women in need of a refuge, and then there's not enough space. So I think so. Yeah, allocation, then is going to be made in terms of I, I guess each organisation will have (...) will have a different type, right. So if it's a BME organization will be like, obviously, it will be a new woman, you know, like, and then I guess I do like risk levels, you know, like, they, you know, probably like gonna, gonna (...) gonna take into account, but then one of the biggest like, kind of issues there like to access, I mean, anyone can access a refuge, but actually a refuge space is really expensive. So, you know, to most for most women to be able to access they need to have access to public resource to public funds, otherwise, they will have to pay privately, which would be a lot more than rent a house.

So, in practice, to access a refuge, you actually have to have like public funds access to public funds. That means that you, you know, in this (...) this is accordance with your immigration status, and this hasn't (...) hasn't really changed with the Domestic Abuse Bill. So I think that's, that's like one of the main kind of issues, to be honest, in terms of like migrant women, that there isn't like really provision. I mean, there are certain extent depends on your immigration status. So if you're like a spouse of a British citizen, you can apply for the like, domestic abuse concession rule and I can also apply to indefinitely To remain also, I think if you now (...) I don't know, also, because I think a lot of stuff has changed with Brexit, you know, like, but before, you know, like, obviously if you're, you know, like had a European Union (...) European citizenship or like were married to European citizen then you would have, you know, access to, to public funds. Now, I don't know, but I think probably like a lot of Europeans also, you know, have no access to public funds in certain circumstances. And it was already the case in the past, because if they couldn't prove that they weren't, or have been working [in our department?] have been working. So there are loads of little gaps there. That makes it quite, quite complicated, actually. And also leave a lot of women without, without the support, you know, like, and without access to the refuge.

RE: And how do you find houses she uses as a refuge?

RPC: How do you...what?

RE: How do you find houses or properties to use as a refuge?

RPC: What do you mean, how do you find a property that you can?

RE: Yeah, I mean, if you can, I don't know if your organization's contact housing associations or private owners, just to make the refurbishment in the building to make to use as a refuge.

RPC: Okay, that's a good question. To be honest, I don't I don't really know much about it. Because like, I'm not, I haven't actually worked in (...), you know, I've worked at [organisation z], but it wasn't actually managing the refuge or like, part of this operation. What I do know is that, yeah, normally through a house has association. So I mean, [organisation z] refuge was like, through a House Association, some refuges have, are funded by, you know, partially funded by the government, [the charity] have refuge and didn't have any funding. So I think that's also not the issue, right? Because, like, what organizations can have access is actually quite complicated, I think, because you have to put in place a lot of policies, and you need to make sure that it's like, a safe, you know, like, safe house. So, you know, there needs to be a lot of like, there are a lot of logistics, you know, like, involved in the add in, and safety procedures, and so on. So, I think there's also one, you know, like, a big like, barrier, for like, especially [some] organisations, small organisations, you know, like, even when they see that there is a need for the community to have a refuge, you know, like, can they would like to set out one is like, it's really hard, you know, like, sometimes it is like, my, I feel like, well, actually doesn't, it doesn't, yeah, doesn't compensate, you know, like, so they end up like not doing because it won't be (...) Yeah, they might not be able to. But I think on an [ordinal?] is like having the knowledge like, then I think it helps them to then create orders. So that's why like, for example, [the charity] ended up being able to open other refuges, because they had been running this one refuge for like, decades. And then they were like, Well, we actually have this knowledge. And we have

some experience, you know, and we have already a contract with a housing association. So we can now you know, like, you start developing this relationship to them open all the records, and have the credibility and legitimacy and so on. But I think it's actually quite something that is quite complicated, and especially for small organisations.

RE: Still, they have have been growing a lot. And they are managing, like, [number] refugees. Right. So yeah, I don't know, you should be crazy.

RPC: Yeah. Totally, totally. But I think that it took a lot of a long time for them to actually open a second, you know, like, they were running with the first time for like, decades. And I think it really shows that is because they they managed to build this experience. And also, it was a moment where [the charity] was already growing anyway, in terms of like, getting a bit more funding, you know, like, and more staff members and so on. Yeah, even though as long as they used to be in the past that would not have been able right so but yeah, there's a lot.

RE: What can the organization or local authorities do if there is not enough room or space for the demand of women and children in need?

RPC: if there's not enough space, like in refuge, you mean?

RE: Yes, yes. Kind of (...) because otherwise they will go they're going to end up in mixed accommodation like I said at the beginning. So if you don't if they don't have these options, like even mixed accommodations or, or refuge or other kind of temporary accommodation, what can they do? Because I heard from other organisation, they're like looking for rooms in [an app] Yeah, and then placing the families is in this rooms. I mean, I don't know if it's (...) yeah, how does this work? I mean...

RPC: yeah, that's really not appropriate to be honest. I mean, what I should do is it should like, have more social housing, you know, like invest more. Yeah, refuge, you know, like, Yeah, this is a it's really not appropriate. It shouldn't. It's also like, Yeah, I mean, it's a struggle, you know, the issue is the structural. We don't like have (...) like a lack of like public housing, you know, like, so, it can only be like, so blurry that right? Like, instead of being like, always, like, Oh, it's a temporary solution, but you can use this temporary solution long term, right? And it's going from one to another, or like, Okay, we don't have women's refuges, we're gonna put in a mix, gender, you know, host accommodation, and now it's gonna be like a spare room, you know, like, it also you don't know who this person is going to be, you know, like, they're going to be like, carrying with, you know, like, it's not going to be appropriate for either the people that are there and the people who are moving. So, yeah, I mean, that's really, this should not be something that they've doing definitely.

RE: For how long this women and children can stay in the combination could be? Well, you talked already about the mix, the mix accommodation, but in terms of the refuge, how long can they stay?

RPC: in the refuge. I mean, there's no set time, but normally, I think, like their recommendations that they they should stay for three to six months. But then obviously, it depends on the case, you know, I mean, I know, you know, that in [the

charity], someone stayed, you know, between three to six months, but always except for a year or a year, you know, like, depends, like, yeah, depends on the complexity of the case depends, like, because the idea is also like that they should, you know, have this really supported accommodation, you know, like benefits, you know, like from from the refugee also like, is kind of crisis, you know, refugees, but it is also crisis, kind of like response, right, like, so, you can reduce the immediate risk, you know, but also then resume, I can receive all the support, you know, that she needs to also kind of like, start, you know, like, yeah, kind of rebuilding her strength, you know, her confidence and so on. And then when she, it can also help in, in practical ways, right? Like, and also bureaucratically easy, you know, like to, to move on in terms of that, like getting the help that she needs, from the government and so on. And then helpful to rehousing ideas, and then to be able to, you know, like have, ideally would like be rehousing and have her own home and be independent, like and actually start to rebuild her life. In that sense, this will be the ideal, but we know that, you know, there's so many issues on the way, you know, like, sometimes the risk, you know, like, continues, you know, after this, it's time or sometimes it's just is not possible to rehouse the woman that quickly because of the local authorities they have no, no houses. So are they like just yeah, just kind of like not taking responsibility rejecting applications (...) So we especially in [the organisation] like, that would be one of the issues is like, well, you can't, if the local authority is rejecting an application, you just have to keep like appealing, like and trying, again, again, because what are you gonna do, you know, are you going to evict you know, like, a woman, which is something that some refugees end up having to do sometimes, you know, [big one?], the local authority deny, like, continue paying, you know, like can rehousing the woman. But often, you know, like, it's not the most appropriate thing to do is to try you know, like, all the other ways of doing that, which means that you have to end up with, like, some residents in like, staying there longer. Yeah, but I think ideally, will be three to six months. Because I think it's also like it is that like, well, you know, hopefully, like, you wouldn't need more time. And you also know, to create this, this (...) Yeah, this kind of, I mean, I don't like this, this word, but you know, to set an accent like this, especially when someone is very vulnerable. Sometimes you can, like, it needs a lot of support, right? Like, but it's important not to kind of normalize that you're going to need the support like forever so not to create this this sense of dependency which is like I'm not even saying like dependency in a very like, which is like sometimes I emotional dependency, right? Like this idea that like I'm only able with the (...) with this, you know, this structure or are these people these, people that have helped me first and so on, but also to yet to make room for the, for the woman to know that I was in a crisis situation. So it's important that like, they move on because there are so few spaces that if you don't move or move on, like, in a timely manner, then there'll be a backlog of like a lot of other woman like waiting for space right?

RE: Any policies, strengths, challenges or suggestions that you would like to reinforce or make? Could be policy or practicalities?

RPC: Yeah, I think in terms of like policies, I think the most important thing, I guess, I mean, prac-, practice and policy, like it's the (...) Yeah, we need more refugees, like definitely more woman's refuge, we need more. BAME refugees, because at the moment is now the levels are, like, really low and not meeting the demand there. Like, if you look, there are statistics, you know, like, I think, yeah, I think there's like, say, like, you know, like, how short we are, you know, like, refugees in terms of the demand

and it's crazy, the number the other thing is like, in terms of like changes of policies, you know, legislations like we need, I think it's like the [symbol company?] like it's just like actually like rectifying the Istanbul Convention would mean that we would give support you know, like to in like, would me like recognizing the needs of migrant women so, you know, like making them actually able to access public funds and public support and therefore access refuge you know, like through public you know, like funds so, I think that that is the most important kind of like change of legislation at the moment I think that we need to make sure that like they have full protection the migrant have full protection in other areas, but that would mean also in in terms of like housing and refuge. (...) Oh, I think I lost you or you're muted.

RE: Oh sorry, thank you for your contribution!

RPC: You're welcome.

RE: Just one more thing I would like to ask so I can understand a bit better about the relocation of these survivors of violence when the regulations, guides say that she cannot stay in the same borough or in other where she has relatives of friends. Well, I don't really know how to ask this, this (...) But, what happen with these women after spending some time in the refuge, how does she gain independence but also very isolated?

RPC: Yeah, yeah...absolutely. This is another thing that I didn't mention, actually. It's a very important point. It's not that they can't live in the same borough, it's not safe. So this is like it's not safe for them. Right. So it's an and I think these kinds of legislations, it says that. So the council's cannot reject applications of women from another borough. Because normally what I mean in terms of housing legislation, if you're not a domestic violence survivor, you would have to prove that you have a local connection. And this is actually an issue that we saw, like the research we did at [the charity], like in the practice that a lot of counselors were still asking so let's say a woman is like, you know, suffered domestic violence in [borough] and she's like, Okay, I'll I'm gonna make her homelessness application in [another borough], that is like really far from here. So it has, you know, a [redacted] community there, but then [this another borough] says, like, No, you can't, because you don't have a local connection here. And then, you know, like, an advocate would be like, No, actually, she doesn't need a local connection, because she has to suffer domestic violence. So she actually can do homelessness application, any council. So I think that's really actually really, really, really important that they you know, like the policy the guidance says the current guidance says that it's not even just guidance actually, like, you know, they have to follow it. So, and this is to protect them. But, I'm, you know, like I might be wrong, but my understanding is they're like they, you know, they can also do a homeless obligation in the young (...) [connection lost]

RE: Oh, no, I think I lost you

RPC: Can, can hear me now?

RE: Yeah, I think so.

RPC: Ok. so yeah. So this is like so this is it's kind of more like, so that the counselors don't reject the application. So I think that's actually really good, really important. But

my understanding is that they can also, survivors can also do homelessness application in the borough, but they pretend to the perpetrator also leaves, but it's just not safe. So there will be advice again, so normally a support worker would advise them, I guess, right. But there are cases where they say, like, I see, you know, I feel, you know, like, I feel safe here or no, like, if there are like things put in place. But it's true that like, this means, you know, like having to move, you know, the onus is often on them like that they have to move away from the perpetrator and like, and they lose their community support. And I think that's definitely like, a huge issue. But and that's why like, one of the things I will say is like, is that when they are relocated whenever rehoused, they should be rehoused at least to a place where, you know, they have some sort of, like, community support, and especially when we're talking about BAME women, and we were saying they're often like, the user was not taken into account, you know, like, you know, like, so I'm saying here, like, look at someone that, you know, like, some of them are from [borough], but then it's like, okay, I'm gonna, I want to be relocated to [another borough]. Because there, at least I have some sort of, like, there is a big [specific] community, I have some friends and so on. But this is the this is normally not taken into account. So it's not, it's not so much. It's not in policy, there's nothing written there. But he's just in practice. This is not taken into account by the councils, they are just like, 'well, no, we don't either, like, oh, say like, we don't have a house here, we just have [redacted] really far away places like outside of -, almost outside alone London, where, especially for a BAME woman, you know, like, they might feel like really isolated, but also, you know, like, sometimes, you know, like, you have so for races who like, you know, racially targeted, you know, like, if they have like faith communities, you know, like this, like, might be like super far from you know, like, where, yeah, the faith communities are, you know, like, the temple or like, the church and so on. Yeah, so there's, you know, if they have like language barriers, you know, like, they will not gonna be able to communicate with people around. So yeah, so I think these are all like, issues that definitely needs to be addressed, especially if we say like, oh, there it is, that they're going to move on to totally by themselves, and all I can have independent lives, but like, I mean, nobody lives in or like you, like, independence is not isolation, right? Like, since like, we all Yeah, we, we are social beings. So like, is independent, but you need to have a community any, like a community support. So you need, you need to be in the condition so that you are able to build this rebuild this community, right? Because it's often that you like rebuilding your life and your community support, you know, like making friends, you know, like and so on. But you need this condition to be there.

RE: Thank you very much. That's, that's what I think also. That's the most important thing, actually, about rehousing. I'm always keen to reinforce the fact that we need more social housing. Because while the private market is going to be more cheaper, they're going to be more accessible. And well, it's going to serve a lot of problems, not only homelessness of domestic violence survivors, but also other kinds of homeless people. Right.

RPC: Totally, totally.

RE: Thank you very much. That's it. Have a nice weekend.

RPC: Thank you. Good luck with your dissertation and please, send me when you finish. If you want to send me. I don't know.

RE: Sure, thank you!

Interview 5

Date: 15/07/2022

Participants: Author (RE), Organisation Director (OD) and Housing Advisor (HA)

* Some information given in this interview could disclose confidentiality so they were [masked] or [redacted]. They were also requested during the recording as it is possible to see below.

RE: Yes. So I'll keep it short and then going through the questions. So how do you find houses to use as refuge? How do you find houses or properties to use as a refuge?

OD: Oh, okay. Right. So basically, we have a long term kind of relationship and partnership, shall we say, with housing association? And that's that's how we found these houses. So we rent their houses from the Housing Association, so we are not owners of them.

RE: Do you refurbish the spaces? How does that work?

OD: Yeah, well, within within British accommodation and these kinds of schemes, they, you know, we are the managing agents. And what that means is that we, we have some responsibilities to upkeep of the property. But the Housing Association also has other responsibilities in specifically common areas and general health and safety. I mean, they work with us so that all these standards are kept, you know, so there's all sorts of checks and issues that they need to be able to, to know, that we're doing properly. This is kind of a mutual accountability thing, right. So part of the responsibility is on us as managing agents, but they also hold responsibilities, for example, in sort of wider, what they call cyclical repairs and decorations. So so it's a it's a mix responsibility. Yeah. So, they have responsibility on the major things, the structural, you know, I will have responsibility for our, for other specific things more in terms of the day to day functioning of the properties.

RE: Yeah. Okay. And what are the requirements to ask for refuge?

OD: The requirements for us to be on a refuge or for a woman to be?

RE: For a woman.

OD: They have to, well, they undergo through like a very, a nuanced process, let's shall we say, because we're the first element is, is the kind of the safety. So, they will be assessed, they will come to us, and we will consider them based on like the level of risk that they're going through. Now, because we're [buying for?] organization, we would only accept referrals that come from the women or from our communities, women that we can support. As you know, we also support women from other BAME macros, as long as we are able to work with them. So they would need to either speak

[particular languages] in some occasions with but those would be exceptions rather than loans with we would we have accepted women from other communities that don't quite speak either of those languages, but then we would have like a partnership with an organization that would support those in the language with, but those cases have been rare historically. Because we know it's very complicated. It's it's very important that we can communicate with a woman. So, that's like, the initial like, who do we take in? Right, with regards to assessments? Is that your question? No. So, what are the different things? Basically the woman. I mean, it has to be a high risk case, you know, it has to be a case where, where she's very aware that what is involved, like, what she needs to do when she comes into a relationship, she needs to agree, you know, on having the, the rules of the house. Exactly. So [the Housing Advisor] can tell us a little bit more because she's, you are involved in that process? No, not really, no, it's more towards the end, when, the, because [she] support the refuge staff who were in the process of rehouse. And then once they leave the refuge, but to bring them in, that's the refuge team that does that. So but yeah, so they need to, they need to be quite clear that they need to adhere to, to the rules of the house. So, these are houses, they will have their rooms, but there will be sharing spaces with others. And there is a number of confidentiality and rules of convivency or how will you say that English? Living together? Convivency, you got it? That they really need to follow and, and because this a woman's or come with histories of trauma and all of that we know that's not necessarily the most easy for them. So, obviously our services do provide support to them make from the practical to the emotional of that.

HA: May be something to add value will correct [me if I am wrong?] terms of immigration status for fund. And maybe it's important to mention that, obviously, some don't have access. But still there are other refuge.

OD: Exactly, yeah. So from this point of view, that's a very good point, actually, [Housing Advisor]. [RE], [redacted], obviously, our women come with like, usually either insecure immigration status or like, some sort of issue of immigration. So, in order for them to be (...) for us to be able to support them to, you know, for them to have the place in the refuge, they need to have access to public funds, in some way, [shape, or form?]. Now, we do have some very limited, very, very limited resources to support women that have no recourse at all. But, that very resource, that very resource is very limited. And why there's policy issue that we're trying constantly to, you know, to put forward knowing the government that they need to expand the channels through which women that have gone through domestic abuse, but have no secure immigration status can still access in a way that is sustainable for them and for their organizations. Because for us, we can really withstand the financial burden, you know, for a long period of time with, in all of the cases that we would like to (...) if that's the case, so that's an issue. So we would always support them in getting their status, because in a lot of the time, a lot of the cases, women actually will have some recourse, but they'll come you know, agencies prior to you know, that when before they come to us, they would they would not necessarily consider the whole extent of their case, and they will just very easily dismiss them as non recourse or, you know, yeah, they're, they consider it very complicated, basically. And what that means is that, you know, they often have to sort of go from one agency to the other, and so on. And that is also another element that that is a barrier for them. But, yeah, they have to have recourse in some way, [shape, or form?]. And we do support them throughout. So we would not

dismiss them almost automatically as as unfortunately happens. In other instances, as we've seen.

HA: Something to mention is the family's case. There is, obviously there are single women, but there are also women with kids. [OD] will correct me about the policy on the ages that the children ages that are allowed, because some women have three children or even four or more.

OD: Yeah. So yeah, we (...) they can come up with children too. But yeah, so it would be for, in terms [of age], for example, we wouldn't accept boys are older than 14. And yes, because of the sizes of our rooms, you know, and how comfortably they can be accommodated, you know, it's up to three children. And this is because one of our refuges does have like capacity to have, you know, families that big. But you know, that's kind of the average. So we do have one of our refuges since we've tried to support women that are single in one of our refuges, because the conditions of refuge is also better for them. Because this is only (...) I mean, it's better for single women in the sense that it's not suitable for women with families. So we try to reserve the cases that come, you know, women are coming without children for that refuge. But then, [in case of the others], it is appropriate for children to be there. So but yeah, so there is there is a consideration of the number of children in the family, there is consideration, as, as I was mentioning, in terms of safeguarding of them, understanding that confidentiality of the refuge is absolutely critical that they need to agree not to be in touch with the perpetrator. And this is challenging because in violence in situations of violence, women would they would like to go out because that's why they're reaching out to support, yeah? But the situation means often that they kind of toss and turn in between, you know, the perpetrators, you know, pull, you know, towards them, and perpetrators often try to continue contacting the woman, right? And at least a rule for them. If they're saying you're registered, they should not they cannot do that. Yeah, because they, if they do that they put in danger themselves and also the rest of the women in the refuges. Because if if perpetrators find out the location, then you know, they can turn up I mean, it's (...) it's a real important [incarnation?] for us and they need to be very clear from understand that.

RE: And when you're talking about the your connection with the Housing Association, you mean, the Housing Association in between the borough that [the organisation] is settled? Or are you talking about other kind of housing associations within other boroughs as well?

OD: Well, right now, I don't know if you're too familiar with housing associations history in this country, but the one that we have partnership with used to be called [redacted], it was a smaller proper housing association. Right now, they kind of merged with the larger one. And there is, is people, and these, these really are essentially property developers. So yes, in terms of legally speaking, there are housing associations, but they are to all extents and purposes like private property developers. So there's largest conglomerates, that's what I'm saying. So they have properties all over London, and indeed, the UK. Is that what you were asking?

RE: Yeah, more or less. I mean, if you can find refuge in other boroughs, it would be safer for women who are living in the borough that [the organisation] is settled, essentially, at the moment, for example, because I know, from the homeless legislation

for domestic violence is that women cannot stay in the same borough they were living with the perpetrator?

OD: That's correct. Yeah.

RE: Right? So they need to move on to another different borough. How this different geographies would work? Because I think, as well, women shouldn't have any other connections, personal connections in this other boroughs as well. So that's why they're becoming more and more isolated in that in that sense.

OD: Well, I mean, the principle of when they flee abuse, is that yes, they need to be moving outside of the risk area. Right? So, (...) So yeah, so we wouldn't accept a referral. And it would be very complicated for us in very specific circumstances, but we wouldn't accept that referral if the if the woman (...) the (...) if the borough the woman is fleeing from is it's close (...) is close to the risk area. It's close to it right now.

HA: I mean, if there is, a woman is at risk for, let's say, [location 1], where we have one of the refugees, we can try to see if there is any availability of the refugees or spaces that we have. So there is a space in [location 2], we can obviously consider that moving, going to [location 2] instead of [location 1].

RE: Ok.

OD: Yeah. Because we have different rotations. But, (...) But, to your point about (...) Yeah, so we would in general the scheme, you know, when a woman comes to [the organisation], yes, you know, you would, we would consider what space is available, what type of family it is, because that's a filter, right? So that if it's a woman with three children, we want we can offer this smaller refuge, even if we have the space there, as I said, right? And then there is the limit of risk as well in terms and the and the location of it. That's, that's very true. (...) By the way, it's important, if possible, please, you know, don't mention the exact boroughs.

RE: No, no, no, no, don't worry. Yeah. I completely understand.

OD: Um, so yeah, but yeah, you're right, in terms of the connection. They (...) Yes. I mean, they develop local connections, obviously, once they're in the wreck. So one of the arguments that we make, when we're resettling them out, the refuge is okay, we then have developed connections in the borough because of them living in the refuge. So that's that's one of the things that we use, so that the borough where the refuge is based support those women. So that's, that's one thing that we (...) that we, that we do use not so as a tool for them to help us. But yeah, it's challenging because of, you know, well, you know, better than the more than most of us know fully. There's shortage in counseling, so they won't have necessarily available in locations that are desirable as well kind of women (...)

HA: (...) chosen?

OD: Exactly.

HA: I believe it is a very (...) that resources are very limited. It can be tricky.

RE: So let's question. What are the most important housing policies that guarantee emergency housing for victims of domestic violence?

OD: What are the support the (...) policies?

RE: The most important housing policies that guide these women to find the refuge or or even on a temporary accommodation?

OD: Mm hmm. Well, I mean, obviously, they need (...) well, right now they need to refer to the domestic abuse act and the statutory guidelines and actually being published recently that they started regarding guidelines, that really is amplifying, you know, what the law, you know, the things that were achieved by by the sector and by other people, that legislation, so that involves everything from the type of support that they they should have accessibility to, you know, to, you know, obviously, they consider in legislation, domestic abuse, in the broader sense. And it's, and they, they have a specific section of the law that is on safe accommodation for survivors of abuse, no, and safe accumulation is not just refuges evolved are the types of accumulation. So, so the law specifies, under such strict guidance, of course, then all those different kinds of accommodation that they could access, depending on what you know, what the type of situation they're in, in some cases, refuges is not an option.

HA: So basically, I mean, the law, I mean, now with a new Bill, it states that any woman, I mean, victim of domestic abuse should be able to be accommodated or placed in a temporary accommodation, you know, this is this is kind of the main rule. We know, that in practice, things are not so straightforward. But (...) I mean, in theory, any big claim of domestic abuse should be be able to be placed in a temporary accommodation and the accommodation can be a self contained, it can be a bed and breakfast, it can be a hostel, you know...

OD: it can be a refuge

HA: it can be a refuge. Yeah, but I mean, in practice, sometimes it's a local authorities get very a tight, I mean, very strict or very, or, or they don't really know how to deal with domestic violence cases. So the cases can become very complicated or not as straightforward as to give accommodation straight away.

OD: Yeah, there are (...) they are, how (...) they're considered priority need.

HA: Exactly. So a woman in domestic abuse is considered as having and being a priority need. So the local authorities should just (...) just with that be able to support the women and the family. Unfortunately, sometimes it's, you know, we have to keep advocating and fighting for that.

OD: Whenever that's the main piece of legislation also. So obviously, still supply, is it the Homelessness Reduction Act? Yes. That's still in combination with the Domestic Abuse Act. And there are the two key legal frameworks for supporting survivors. Yeah.

RE: Okay. But well, I think maybe you agree with me that I believe that everyone who's fleeing violence, every woman in the case and children, they should go to a refuge because it's, it's better for all of them. Because going to a mix accommodation could be like, reproducing the cycle of violence, they don't know who's sharing the spaces

and, you know, the drug addicts that are criminals as well. And it's not it's not like the proper place for these families are these women to stay with?

HA: I mean, I would say that it depends is no black and white, okay. There is also I mean, think suppose I can be good, but can they know that good. So going to refuge typing the advantage is that at least the experience in our refuges, the women are say, they are nice houses, everything is provided we have there are no (...), I mean, I mean, for me, our refuges are very high quality standards. Yeah, obviously some women can can say something different, but we try to provide everything, you know, or that at least clean that a the mattresses are in good condition. We give them then a new duvet to every single new resident and all these. So that is good, because it's a place that also is a nice place, obviously shared, but it's you know, I mean, it's good, it's good. And also there's the casework. As I've worked with the refugees, they provide, I mean, the full support, obviously, it cannot say that we can cover every, like mental health issues, because this is something different. But we've tried to survive, as a legal support, if needed, a counseling, we have, we provide counseling [redacted], so we have a massive support around. But the thing is, the issue comes is at the end, because in the end, women have to live, even if we say up to three or six months. So the issue starts again, when they have to be rehoused. Because they have to start the process with the local authority. Yeah, she's going through the homelessness process. So she's, I mean, they homeless, this process implies that they have to go to a temporary accommodation, again, even I mean, can be a mixed accommodation content, by in the end the process cannot continues. So it's not like they leave the refuge and they will be provided a permanent accommodation. Yeah, that is not the case.

OD: So we the ideal, but yeah, obviously, you know.

HA: So what happens is, that is also very traumatic and very disturbing for the women, because they expect that process not to have I mean, no, they cannot even imagine that, that is the process, they really become thinking that because they've been a temporary accommodation, as as a refuge, the next step is just to find, you know, to have the private and nice permanent accommodation. And and unfortunately, the reality is no like that. So it can be, it can be another difficult process for them. So whereas if they go straight into a temporary accommodation from the beginning, obviously, they will escape. This is the I mean, this is that from being in a refuge, so it is, but also been in it in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority directly, it doesn't mean that they will have the support that is provided in the refuges. So it's not black and white. So it's good, um, you know,

OD: Yes, and also [RE], you know, there will be cases where, where women, where women could be better off, not in a way, I mean, it's still escaping abuse is still finding her way out of the situation of abuse, but it could be better off in our different kinds of accommodation. Hmm, so those are also schemes that the, you know, that are out there and available. But [HA] Yes, I mean, I understand your point about, you know, you know, that refugees are (...) refugees are, especially when you consider from the point of view of trauma, and, you know, really moving on in a way that is kind of empowering and long term lasting and all of that, yes, you know, there is there are a lot of benefits to refuges being like that stepping stone, but you know, women have to come to refuge already with the understanding that is this is temporary. So we thought that that's one of the things actually in your initial question, we do tell them that they're not going to be able to stay there forever, we know, they need to know that this is

temporary, that is, you know, six to nine months. So in exceptional circumstances, because of different reasons, you know, sometimes issues are complicated, the woman's case being complicated, or when the pandemic happened, that we have to have women for a longer period of time. But other than that, like the case, you know, this scheme is not designed to have women for that long. Because you know, that creates a backlog as well. Because then you know, then all the women that do need the space, they're in a more emergency are not able to access it. Right? So that's another challenge that we also need to bear in mind. So the circulation of the women have to happen, the refuges are not long term solutions for the women that are the solutions for when they're fleeing a very risky, very dangerous circumstance for them. But there are levels of domestic abuse that may not be that high level of a risk, because a woman can be supported to move outside, you know what I mean? Yeah, that those those kinds of extremes to support to support different levels of risk also exists so that's what I'm saying to you, but but like, yes, of course we are specialized in migrated crisis and emergency accommodation. And so yeah, so we will take (...) we will take the highest cases, high risk cases in that sense. So yeah.

RE: Okay. Yeah, it's almost eleven. Sorry. Let's finish them. Thank you very much. You both.

OD: See, [RE], do you have any more questions? Because I would need to cut the call for a minute and if you want [HA] can continue with you.

RE: Oh, yeah, I have more question, but I believe we have touched on all of them, so it's okay.

OD + HA: Yeah? You can drop us an email, [RE].

[redacted]

RE: Okay, thank you very much.

OD: Thank you. Good luck with your study.

RE: Thank you. I'll be in touch. Bye.

OD + HA: Bye. Thank you.