

MATEUSZ SZAST

HOUSING SHORTAGE: A SERIOUS SOCIAL PROBLEM IN IRELAND

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: A COUNTRY OF BOTH EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

Ireland as a picturesque island shrouded in unusual sights and cultural mosaics, has constantly attracted the interest of ethnographers, anthropologists or sociologists. A small, sparsely populated country, although multifaceted due to low reserves of natural resources, emphasis on imports and agro-pastoral social structure. The capital city, Dublin, as an agglomeration, concentrates over 30% of the Irish population.¹

The uniqueness of Ireland determines its multiculturalism and cultural rootedness in elements of tradition, language, beliefs along with identity built on the history of a nation experienced numerous times, such as the potato blight causing a great famine, a crisis leading to Irish migration in search of a better life, particularly overseas in the United States of America. Nowadays, in the 21st century, the country is still characterized by numerous features that attract researchers of ethnographers, anthropologists as well as sociologists. A remarkable field of research for the indicated professions is migration and the related processes. Ireland has been a country of emigration for many decades and, remarkably, the country's largest community of Irish descent lives outside Ireland, in the U.S. On public holidays, such as March 17th in commemoration of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, the largest parade is not in Dublin but in the U.S. Outside the country live above 10 million of Irish people, whilst in Ireland, there are precisely over 5 million, according to the 2022 Census. In April 2022, Ireland held a national census.

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¹ *History and Society*, <https://dublin.ie/live/life-in-dublin/history-society> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

Detailed results will not be available until April 2023; however, it is already possible to demonstrate a quantity of partial data, which proves that the country owns a higher population turnover. The preliminary data is remarkable in that the census owns the highest population participation in a census since 1841, where:

- population of 5.1 million as of April 3, 2022 (7.6% increase relative to the 2016 census);
- all counties present a population growth from 2016;
- there was a net inward migration of more than 190,000 in the six years between the 2016 census and the 2022 census;
- housing stock increased to 2.1 million (+6%);
- the number of vacant housing units (excluding vacation homes) fell to 166,752 (−9%).²

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According to official data from the Census Division, we learn that there has been a 361,671 increase in Ireland's population since 2016, consisting of a natural increase (births minus deaths) of 171,338 as well as an estimated net internal migration (population change minus natural increase) of 190,333. Taking into account the latest census data from the spring (April 3, 2022), it ought to be noted that Ireland's housing construction, which as a viable resource for meeting the housing requirements of residents, both indigenous and immigrant, accounted for 2,124,590 (a 6.0% increase relative to 2016). In 2022, vacant housing units were 16,560 less (−9.0%) compared to 2016. Excluding vacation homes, of which there were 66,135, compared to 62,148 in 2016. It is significant to remember, as researchers with census counters mention, that a vacancy does not indicate that a unit can be made available for occupancy, since “[c]ensus vacancy is essentially a point-in-time measure that might differ from further reported measures of vacancy, which could concentrate further on long-term vacancy. A dwelling is classified as vacant by census counters if it is unoccupied for a short or long period of time around the census night. For instance, residence might be unoccupied for the reason that it becomes available for sale or rent, under renova-

² Central Statistics Office (CSO), Census of Population 2022 – Preliminary Results (Press Statement, 23 June 2022), p. 1–2. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpr/censuspopulation2022-preliminaryresults/introduction/?utm> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

tion, or if the owner has died or is placed in a nursing home. Dwellings under construction along with abandoned properties are excluded in the housing vacancy census as well.”³

The housing problem in Ireland was and continues to be a problem due to the growth of the overall population and changes in the structure of migrants coming to live in Ireland. Following a general decline in the number of people of Polish descent (below 100,000 in 2022, but around 115,000 before the COVID-19 pandemic).⁴ A smaller number of Polish-speaking citizens is visible in Irish streets, airports, churches or schools. The overall number of carrier rotations to Poland (Ryanair) is reduced, with fewer and fewer citizens traveling to Ireland, whereas a number of citizens travel to Ireland for the purpose of family reunions or to visit relatives. Observing migrants directly on the ground, it is noted that the number of Bulgarian, Romanian citizens is increasing.

The housing shortage problem affects not merely migrants but includes students as well. The local press reports that in the Irish capital Dublin have been cases in which students arriving in Dublin have had to spend the night on the street, in cars, or at friends’ places, as they couldn’t find accommodation upon arrival. As a result, the situation becomes particularly uncomfortable that a substantial group of students decide to abandon studies and return to home states or cities. The press reports that “one student who spoke to the Irish Examiner recently spent two nights sleeping on the streets in downtown Cork because the hostel where he was staying was booked for the weekend. Sebastian Carvallo Farina from Chile is currently couch surfing.” In contrast, a further instance is this: “Another student in Dublin bought an old car for €800 because it was her only option. Now she sleeps on a couch in a friend’s house.” The housing problems are a consequence of several compounded social problems in Ireland: soaring rents, a shortage of housing, the cost of living rising at an exponential rate and COVID-19 pandemic. The situation for students in Ireland is quite appalling, according to research by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS), that “half of students

³ Ibidem.

⁴ M. SZAST, *The Contemporary Migrant Family in the Eyes of a Pole in Ireland*, “*Studia Polonijne*” 41(2020), pp. 287-298.

share a room with three or more people. One in 10 is forced to share a room with six or more people. Only one in 10 had their own room.”⁵

Data from reports regarding the units available on the market (Daft.ie report for the first quarter of 2022) indicates that at the beginning of February there were fewer than 1,400 rental properties in the country. In Dublin, merely 712 properties recorded the lowest level since the beginning of the Daft’s survey in 2006.⁶ According to the survey, the average rent at the end of 2021 was €1,524 nationally, an increase of more than 10% over the year.⁷ Government announcements point to increased expenses on housing in Ireland, with a declaration that Ireland will spend €20 billion on the housing crisis over five years. In the second quarter, the increase affected property prices in Ireland more than 5 percent from the beginning of 2021. The trouble is prices increased faster than people’s income. What is more, housing is becoming more costly as well. The average increase in prices between the first and second quarters was 3.7–4.9 percent. The year-on-year increase was 6 to 11.⁸ The period covered by this phrase is 2021–2026 – the five-year plan announced in September 2021 as part of the Housing for All strategy. €20 billion of investment in housing is planned to increase the number of homes built (around 40,000 per year) and alleviate the housing crisis.⁹

Housing problems in Ireland imply a further phenomenon – pauperization and as homelessness. According to Homeless People, poverty affects 371,000 more people than last year. One in five Irish residents nowadays has already experienced poverty, as 11.6% was recorded in 2021, while 19% this year.¹⁰ According to the data presented in *Housing Costs and Poverty 2022*¹¹ indicates that the actual number of people living in poverty in Ireland will

⁵ *Student Accommodation Crisis Is Impacting Ireland’s Reputation Abroad – Irish Council for International Students*, <https://www.internationalstudents.ie/news/student-accommodation-crisis-impacting-irelands-reputation-abroad-irish-council-international> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

⁶ Daft.ie is Ireland’s leading property portal, which publishes its own quarterly market analysis, known as *The Daft Report*.

⁷ *Irish Rental Report Q1 2022*, ed. Ronan Lyons, The Daft Report, https://www.daft.ie/report/ronan-lyons-2022q1-draftrentalprice?d_rd=1 [accessed: 15.10.2022].

⁸ *Wydadzą 20 mld euro. Irlandia walczy z kryzysem w mieszkaniówce*, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wydadza-20-mld-euro-irlandia-walczy-z-kryzysem-w-mieszkaniowce-6679635742681920a.html> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

⁹ *€20bn Investment in Housing Over 5 Years in New Government Plan*, <https://www.finegael.ie/e20bn-investment-in-housing-over-5-years-in-new-government-plan/?utm> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

¹⁰ *Ireland’s Rich-Poor Gap & Middle-Poor Gap*, <https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/irelands-rich-poor-gap-middle-poor-gap> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

¹¹ *Housing Costs And Poverty 2022*, <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/housing-costs-and-poverty-2022> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

rapidly reach one million.¹² The amount of homeless people in Ireland has risen to 10,492, an increase of 2,478 compared to the equivalent period last year. Social housing in Ireland is being built at a rapid pace, however the requirements are not being fulfilled, as more than 22,000 housing units are under construction.¹³ An element exacerbating the housing crisis is also the influx of refugees from Ukraine, following the Russian invasion of February 2022. According to the data, about 25,000 Ukrainian nationals are currently living in Ireland.

Rental rates have risen by an average of 12.6% more than at this time last year. Current allowances are not enough to aid renters. A rent-freeze measure, which was introduced in 2015 for two years, might prove effective. A fundamental subject is the affordability of housing as well as the construction of new public housing (HAP) units. Figures released this week by the Residential Tenancies Board confirm that terminations increased 58% in the first half of this year. Unfortunately, particular issue could be seen in the number of people becoming homeless each month from the private rental market.¹⁴

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PAUPERIZATION OF IRISH SOCIETY

I intend to supplement the conclusions to be included in the article with the observations I recorded during field research in Ireland in 2022 (October) and carried out in 2019 (July and August). During the first study, in a participatory observation that included two houses inhabited by migrants of the town of Ballyjamesduff in County Cavan, Ulster province, housing shortage was noticeable. An indicator of this subject was the influx of migrants who arrived to work at the local Liffey Meats Ltd, Carton Box, Hilton, stores, bars, pubs (12 establishments), a carpentry shop as well as a mushroom production plant. The city owns a 35% immigrant population, which requires to recognize housing needs. For that purpose, new housing developments were built in 2004 and 2005, however more than a thousand

¹² *Irlandia: Kryzys mieszkaniowy powoduje, że co 5. osoba żyje w ubóstwie*, https://londynek.net/wiadomosci/article?jdnews_id=86364 [accessed: 15.10.2022].

¹³ T. LEMOWSKI, *Kryzys mieszkaniowy w Irlandii – najnowsze dane przerzążą*, <https://polonia.irlandia.pl/kryzys-mieszkaniowy-w-irlandii-najnowsze-dane-przerazaja> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

¹⁴ *Need a Rent Freeze Until More Houses Come*, <https://www.polska-ie.com/potrzebne-zamrozenie-czynszu-dopoki-nie-pojawi-sie-wiecej-domow> [accessed: 15.10.2022].

additional citizens had to be accommodated. Migrants live, forming so-called communes, where they inhabit three- or four-room houses in much larger numbers. A known case of a house was, where Bulgarian citizens were living with 8 adult males in 100 square meters, in three bedrooms, one kitchen along with one bathroom. Occurrence relatively a few similar situations in the observed city, inspired in-depth analysis in this regard. As a migration researcher of Poles in Ireland since 2009, I notice that Polish citizens in Ireland are declining in favor of citizens of other European along with non-European countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania, Kenya, Brazil, South Africa and Botswana. Migrants attempt to exchange information on vacancies in immigrant homes. I observed a remarkable situation in October 2022 during a participant observation, as during conversations between residents of a house on the Percy French Place estate, one of the residents, a 64-year-old man, announced that he intended to return to his country of origin (Poland) for a well-deserved retirement rest. Suddenly, there was an immediate notification of migrants via social networks regarding the vacated place – within minutes the place was occupied. Quite a few houses, despite being ready for occupancy, are vacant. Another issue is the replacement of migrants, i.e. transits of migrant families. Since 2020, following the cessation of lockdown along with reopening, there has been a lower intensity of visits by migrant relatives, which is due to several factors, according to analyses of migrant statements. The first is the dearth of transportation, including rising airfares, airport transfers (in Ireland, fuel prices have grown steeply, so the prices of airport transfers by taxi or private car increased by nearly 30% in 3 years). Housing shortages are hampering visits to family reunification, tourism as well as migration. It is noted that migrants complain about the price of rental housing. The homes I observed in October 2022 experienced an increase in rent. Migrants said that a house (about 180 square meters) to rent in 2015 cost 600–700 euros, today the price is in the range of 1000–1200 euros. The price increase is driven by housing shortages, however by global news trends as well, which directly affect Ireland. Prices of basic products have risen significantly, the basic value of labor is valued in Ireland from 10.50 to 11.30 euros per hour, whereas prices of products have risen to a larger extent, migrants confirm prices of bread, eggs, meat or dairy products. Nowadays, Ireland (2022) has “ageism” which indicates that wages are based on the age of the worker (Table 1).

Table 1. Current earnings in Ireland in 2022

Age	Hourly rate
20 years +	€10.50
19 years	€9.45
18 years	€8.40
Less than 18 years	€7.35

Source: M. MACUR, *Zarobki i najniższa stawka w Irlandii w 2022 roku [aktualny przewodnik]*, <https://www.monito.com/pl/wiki/irlania-zarobki#ile-sie-zarabia> [accessed: 16.10.2022].

Prices of household chemicals (such as cleaning products) have not been as drastically affected. Poles living in Ireland, while interviewed, frequently declare straightforwardly that it is simply no longer worth living in Ireland, as the available resources allow for current consumption and provision of basic needs, without the possibility to save money. A single migrant said outright that he was disappointed by the imposition of additional taxes on every euro earned; what is more, it is not profitable to work overtime in fear of an increase in the tax collected. Currently, the unemployment rate in Ireland is around 14%.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

The housing problems of Irish society are a serious issue that should be addressed. Government officials who determine many aspects of the life and functioning of Irish residents, both indigenous and immigrant populations, must realize that shortages in the housing market are a strong predictor of numerous social phenomena that include pauperization, social exclusion, marginalization, diversification of wealth or social inequality in access to goods, which in this case is a place to fulfil life roles. Shortages in the housing market are primarily a lack of mental comfort for citizens who would like to become independent, start a family or raise children. Housing market deficiency is a widening gap in the housing crisis implying a construction crisis along with a nationwide crisis, as it results in price speculation in the regulation of prices for the sale, rental or subletting of vacant properties,

¹⁵ <https://www.trasa.info/informacje/irlania/praca-i-zarobki-w-irlandii> [accessed: 16.10.2022].

generating price increases, as a consequence might activate unreasonable as well as exorbitant access to vacant premises.

The lack of opportunities in support of family roles may determine the exodus of the indigenous population in favor of the immigrant population as well. It ought to be remembered that the immigrant population, as a rule, is characterized by a lower interest in the realization of family roles in the host country than the native population. The outcome is a decline in the birth rate and a decrease in the number of legalized emotional relationships, which is reflected in Irish statistics as well. There is a noticeable, at least for the Polish migrant group, decline in the transfer of human capital and the movement of Poles to visit relatives.

Taking into account the economic aspect, the issue of tourism is not to be overlooked. Accommodation issues lead to a serious imbalance in the structure of rental or sublease in occasional, holiday rentals, which are becoming more expensive and therefore less attractive for tourists.

Analysis of available data and press reports on housing problems in Ireland remains an issue that should not be ignored, as it might imply further serious social risks, the consequences of which may be severe and difficult to rectify.

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Summary

The presented article focuses attention on an urgent issue in modern Ireland – gaps in the real estate market. It would seem that in the era of post modernity, consumption as well as the development of new technologies, basic existential problems are not considered in the first place, furthermore, a person might pursue additional requirements than the basic necessities of Maslow's pyramid of needs. The socio-economic situation, according to studies as well as statistics, is somewhat inconsistent. Ireland possesses several characteristics on the subject of which the reader is able to read in the following article. First, the country is experiencing an increase in the number of citizens, a relatively high population turnover, as it has gone from being an emigration country to an immigration country. A further aspect is a major social problem – shortages in securing the housing needs of the native and immigrant residents. The indicated deficiencies imply a number of social problems that include pauperization, social exclusion, marginalization, problems of homelessness with, above all, loss of opportunity for economic development of this island country.

Keywords: Ireland; pauperization; homelessness; social security; migration

NIEDOBORY MIESZKAŃ – POWAŻNY PROBLEM SPOŁECZNY W IRLANDII

Streszczenie

Artykuł skupia uwagę na palącym problemie współczesnej Irlandii – lukach na rynku nieruchomości. Wydawać by się mogło, iż w dobie ponowoczesności, konsumpcji, jak również rozwoju nowych technologii podstawowe problemy egzystencjalne nie są rozpatrywane w pierwszej kolejności, a człowiek może realizować inne niż podstawowe potrzeby piramidy A. Maslowa. Sytuacja społeczno-ekonomiczna, wedle badań i statystyk, jest zgoła odmienna. Irlandia charakteryzuje się

kilkoma właściwościami, o których w niniejszym tekście czytelnik może przeczytać. Przede wszystkim kraj ten notuje wzrost liczby ludności, stosunkowo dużą fluktuację ludności, gdyż z kraju emigracyjnego stał się krajem imigracyjnym. Kolejnym aspektem jest palący problem socjalny – niedobory w zakresie zabezpieczenia potrzeb lokalowych mieszkańców zarówno autochtonicznych, jak i napływowych. Niedobory te implikują szereg problemów społecznych, do których zalicza się między innymi pauperyzację, wykluczenie społeczne, marginalizację, kwestię bezdomności, a przede wszystkim utratę szansy na rozwój gospodarczy tego wyspiarskiego kraju.

Slowa kluczowe: Irlandia; pauperyzacja; bezdomność; zabezpieczenie społeczne; migracje