A GENDERED TAXONOMY ON HOUSING PRECARITY. CHALLENGES FROM LISBON METROPOLITAN AREA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

'How to stay home?' is a question that many posed when the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to stay indoors. Housing precariousness is still a problem for circa sixty thousand families in Portugal, to whom escaping poverty, and several types of discrimination is still hard. This paper is based on an action-research project focused on housing precariousness, aiming to build a taxonomy on the different experiences lived by women, under the neoliberal context of the Global North. Starting from 10 in-depth interviews, this paper explores housing precarity from a gendered perspective, identifying some of the main inequalities before and during the pandemic, as well as the priorities proposed for/from women. The relation between housing and gender is questioned from the way we organize ourselves: socially and spatially. Understanding this relation can be a catalyst to better responses and effective public policies, and more effectively end precarity.

Keywords: housing precarity, gender, COVID-19, spatial inequalities.

UMA TAXONOMIA DA PRECARIEDADE HABITACIONAL COM PERSPECTIVA DE GÉNERO. DESAFIOS DA ÁREA METROPOLITANA DE LISBOA DURANTE A PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

Resumo

'Como ficar em casa?' é a pergunta que muitos fizeram quando a pandemia do COVID-19 nos obrigou a ficar em casa. A precariedade habitacional continua a ser um problema para cerca de sessenta mil famílias em Portugal, para quem ainda é difícil escapar à pobreza e a vários tipos de discriminação. Este artigo baseia-se num projeto de pesquisa-ação focado na precariedade habitacional, visando construir uma taxonomia sobre as diferentes experiências vividas por mulheres, sob o contexto neoliberal do Norte Global. A partir de 10 entrevistas aprofundadas, este trabalho explora a precariedade habitacional numa perspetiva de género, identificando algumas das principais desigualdades antes e durante a pandemia, bem como as prioridades propostas para/pelas mulheres. A relação entre habitação e género é questionada a partir da forma como nos organizamos: socialmente e espacialmente. Entender essa relação pode ser um

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Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51–72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

51

catalisador para melhores respostas e políticas públicas efetivas e para acabar com a precariedade de forma mais eficaz.

Palavras-chave: precariedade habitacional, género, COVID-19, desigualdades espaciais.

UNA TAXONOMÍA DE LA PRECARIEDAD HABITACIONAL COM PERSPECTIVA DE GENERO. RETOS DEL ÁREA METROPOLITANA DE LISBOA DURANTE LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19

Resumen

"Cómo quedarse en casa?" es la pregunta que muchos se hicieron cuando la pandemia de COVID-19 nos obligó a quedarnos en casa. La precariedad de la vivienda sigue siendo un problema para unas sesenta mil familias en Portugal, para las que sigue siendo difícil escapar de la pobreza y de diversos tipos de discriminación. Este artículo se basa en un proyecto de investigación-acción centrado en la precariedad de la vivienda, cuyo objetivo es construir una taxonomía de las diferentes experiencias de las mujeres en el contexto neoliberal del Norte Global. Basándose en 10 entrevistas en profundidad, este artículo explora la precariedad habitacional desde una perspectiva de género, identificando algunas de las principales desigualdades antes y durante la pandemia, así como las prioridades propuestas para/por las mujeres. La relación entre vivienda y género se cuestiona desde la forma en que nos organizamos: social y espacialmente. Entender esta relación puede ser un catalizador para mejores respuestas y políticas públicas eficaces y para acabar con la precariedad de forma más efectiva.

Palabras clave: precariedad de la vivienda, género, COVID-19, desigualdades espaciales.

INTRODUCTION

Crises are not gender-neutral, whether they are health, social, economic, military or climate grounded. Women and girls entail differentiated impacts during and after the time of their occurrence. The gender inequalities created by the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the track for equality, undoing decades of progress in the eradication of extreme poverty (AZCONA et al., 2020; FALÚ, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic crisis has specificities that put women at the forefront of the COVID-19 response, since they represent 78% of the nearly fifteen million people practicing as health workers at the end of 2019, in the European Union (EUROSTAT, 2019). In Portugal, this rate is even higher: 82%. When jobs started to disappear or had reductions in working hours, women's overrepresentation in low-paying domestic, hospitality, and healthcare jobs also affected them with greater income losses. The sharp fall in tourism everywhere, also in

52

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

Portugal – a country where this sector plays a major role –, contributed to shut restaurants, hotels, hostels where they are also the most substantial part of the labor force. At the same time, when schools and nurseries closed, children and teenagers came home, both unexpectedly and unprepared, forcing virtual schooling into a routine. From a level of disadvantage were Portuguese women work on average, every day, one hour and forty five minutes more than man, of unpaid work (PERISTA et al., 2016), the pandemic contributed to overload women with more household chores.

Evidence, and consequences, show a profound spatial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both on domestic, collective, and public spaces. The motto 'stay at home' had an impact on vulnerable social groups, showing that housing policy is also health policy. While the scientific world was pushing for the creation of vaccines, fighting COVID-19 became very much a *spatial* challenge, questioning how we, as a society, house the most vulnerable, and what is the role of housing researchers (ROGERS & POWER, 2020).

An extensive 'National Survey on Housing Needs' was published in 2018 by the Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute (IRHU), revealing over 26,000 families in Portugal with severe housing needs. Meaning that, to begin with, the pandemic found an unsolved socio-spatial problem, especially in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. In fact, the Lisbon Area stands out, concentrating 55% of the national severe needs identified, where almost one third of all population live. Given the scale of this issue, the Portuguese government also launched in 2018 a new public policy – *1.º Direito* (First Right) - Housing Access Support Program (Decree-Law 37/2018, June 4) – oriented to the resolution of the situations of greater housing precariousness. To access financial support for this program, municipalities are now obliged to make a Local Housing Strategy. In August 2021, according to official data of IHRU, the number of approved strategies was 87, within 308 municipalities. These 87 alone already surpass the 26,000 families surveyed in 2018. This shows a housing deficit well above the reported number, mainly due to the broadening of the criteria that define precarious housing. Nevertheless, the raising gentrification, housing commodification, evictions, and touristification mark today a growing difficulty in achieving decent housing globally (BRENNER, MARCUSE, & MAYER, 2011; ROLNIK, 2019), and Portugal is no exception (SANTOS, 2019; TULUMELLO, 2019).

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

53

The pandemic exposed both the imbalances of the housing market and housing policies. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the State approved a set of exceptional measures to the housing sector, simply insufficient to cover all the real necessities, namely in places marked by informality (MENDES, 2020b). 'How to stay at home? Immediate interventions to fight COVID-19 in precarious neighbourhoods of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area', starts from the basic premise of having a home during a pandemic, addressing housing precarity with gendered lens, from Lisbon Metropolitan Area.

Structured in five parts, this paper focuses, firstly, the triangulation of women, precarious housing, and the pandemic, presenting the conceptual framework of the analysis; secondly, it presents the research project 'How to stay Home?', specifying their main drivers and case studies; thirdly, describes the methodological framework adopted in the pandemic context, underlying the challenges and methods applied during fieldwork; fourthly, makes a comprehensive analyses of housing precarity from a gender view, identifying the some of the main inequalities before and during the pandemic; finally, priorities proposed for/from women are presented, assuming the collaborative nature of this scientific research.

WOMEN AND PRECARIOUS HOUSING

As Scott (1986) argued, rather than being descriptive, gender should be used as an instrument of analysis, to question the existence of a natural difference between the sexes, which places women in a disadvantageous position in power relations. This reproduction of inequalities has a spatial dimension, expressed in the places woman inhabit, intersecting other social markers that we know are full of meanings and stereotypes.

As Saugeres (2009) posed it, the work of Watson (1986) on housing, inequality and women opened a debate, in spite of the time that feminist theoretical perspectives took to become a part of housing studies. The inclusion of a gender perspective regarding the housing sphere is relatively scarce, as compared with other dimensions such as education or the labor market (KENNETT & CHAN, 2010). Despite this, a recent interest on this topic marks current research contributions in this field (FRIESENECKER & KAZEPOV, 2021; POWER, 2019; POWER & MEE, 2019). Regarding women and housing in Portugal, we witness an absent correlation both in research and action, largely explained by our recent history. The longest

54

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

European dictatorship in the 20th century (1933-1974) kept women away from places of power, and far from being full political subjects. The motto 'God, Homeland, Family' proclaimed by the dictator António Salazar, forged housing within a patriarchal and colonialist society. Today, almost half a century after the revolution that brought democracy, women gained rights (like voting), but housing policies are still marked by a heteronormative nuclear family approach where patriarchal and inequality go hand in hand.

Specifically, the urban poor lacking adequate housing, were always perceived as gender-neutral in tenor, neglecting other important social markers, like race or gender. Structured inequalities in access to housing orbited mostly around class relations in the public discourse, as in other places (MUNRO & SMITH, 1989). Both in academia (thinking) and public policies (acting), the introduction of other analytic categories was done late, being gender a new discussion regarding housing. The recent contribution of Alves (2021) on the crossing between racism, housing and territory, contributed in Portugal to the intersectional dimension on housing, yet to be strengthened in spatial matters.

Nonetheless, gender topics gained a more positive repercussion on public policies in the last years, including those related to housing. Since then, some timid measures were proposed in this field, aimed to promote gender equality, mainly the field of formal equality. At the national level, the recent Portuguese framework Law for Housing (Law no. 83/2019, September 3) underlines that everyone has the right to housing, regardless of ancestry or ethnic origin, sex, language, territory of origin, nationality, religion, creed, political or ideological beliefs, education, economic situation, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or health status (article 2). This goes in line with the constitutional right to housing inscribed in the Portuguese Constitution since 1976. This Law for Housing comprises also active gender mainstreaming by demanding 'periodic survey and dissemination of the existing housing situation in the country, identifying the main quantitative and qualitative needs, broken down, where appropriate, by gender and age, and any failures or dysfunctions in the housing market' (article 16). Substantive equality is slowly appearing among the 'New Generation of Housing Policies' launched in 2018. First Right program, above mentioned, includes, within the scope of vulnerable people, victims of domestic violence, who are mostly women, and it attributes an increase of 10% in the rental support to aggregates with one adult and one or more dependents,

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

55

who are mostly female-headed. At the municipal level, some councils have shown some resistance, or difficulty, to map these vulnerable cases or, on a broader scale, assume gender equality as a topic in their political agenda (JORGE, 2022a). Some exceptions, as Lisbon Municipality shows, also define in municipal housing regulations an additional support to victims of domestic violence and single headed families. However, the support given to precarious situations is manifestly insufficient in face to the scale of the problem and the diversity of situations that it comprises (JORGE, 2022b). The feminization of the housing deficit, that we are witnessing, is the result of living conditions: women are poorer than men, have a higher risk of poverty, and the average pay gap is 14% in 2020, across all age groups and almost all types of contracts, according to INE data, the national statistical system. The global economic downturn after the Great Recession, and as result, the austerity policies and politics set for Portugal from 2011 to 2014, disproportionately affected men and women, and exacerbated the existing inequality. This paved the way for the aggravation of the housing crisis, and the difficulty to manage the pandemic crisis, spatially.

The urgency brought by the pandemic led the Portuguese government to take temporary and exceptional measures aimed at housing. One of the first was the suspension of the evictions, followed by the suspension of the end of lease contracts, and mortgage execution on dwellings used by property owners (MENDES, 2020a). These actions were oriented only to the formal housing market (rental and privately owned) – in cases of confirmed loss of income –, turning access to public aid down a bureaucratic path. The informal rental market or the informal precarious neighborhoods, were therefore excluded, causing many women and their families to be unable to get help during this period.

´HOW TO STAY HOME?' — PROJECT AND METHODOLOGY

'How to stay home? Immediate interventions to fight COVID-19 in precarious neighborhoods of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area', was funded by a special program aiming the production and dissemination of knowledge on the impacts of the pandemic with a gender lens. Therefore, studies produced under this specific line of funding had as principal aim to contribute to the production of knowledge about different impacts and constraints assigned by social relations of gender in the sphere of the individual, family, and society, but also promote responses and design intervention tools.

56

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

The research was based on three pillars of analysis –housing, women, and COVID-19 –, focused on the situations of greater precariousness in the context of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, where 'staying at home' was difficult, or even impossible. Demanding 'social distancing', prescribing telework, or forcing mobility restrictions imposed by lockdowns, curfews, or quarantines, shapes the recipe that Global North used to reduce the spread of SARS-CoV-2, and Portugal was no exception. Built from principles that apply mostly to a middle-class population, by April 2020, about half of the world's population was under some type of lockdown, an unprecedented measure, with almost four billion people in more than 90 countries ordered to 'stay at home'. Rapidly, a major part of the world realized how difficult it was for most of the underprivileged people to follow what is now called the 'new normal'. What to do when even washing hands is difficult? And how to minimize the spread of the virus when housing conditions are far from ideal?

This action research project was developed in the field between July and December 2020, made with the support of a multidisciplinary team composed by architects, anthropologists, geographers, gender studies researchers and one social designer.

Gender was used as an analytic category in relation to housing precarity, under the Portuguese context, with three different aims. The first aim was to create rapid knowledge on how infection rates could lower by creating a spatial awareness on how domestic spaces should be used during the pandemic, and for that, women were regarded as agents of public health. A study carried out in April 2020 (MAGALHÃES et al., 2020), pointed to 'family health' as women's top priority, positioning them to collaborate effectively in 'How to stay home' study. Secondly, it was intended to understand housing precarity from a gendered perspective, under the pandemic context. From an early stage, preliminary results confirmed that the socio-economic effects of the pandemic are asymmetric. If women were already in a disadvantaged position, it was important to understand policies and measures taken, or anticipated, to minimize the impact of a housing crisis that was already affecting disenfranchised people, since the Great Recession and its aftermath (CLAIR et al., 2018). Thirdly, it was aimed to complement the research already produced on this topic. Current research on housing precarity and urban movements, confirms that women have an important role on the urban struggles for the Right to Housing, organized in representative structures, such as residents' associations, or as

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72 Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

57

individuals (FALANGA et al., 2019; JORGE & CAROLINO, 2019; LAGES, 2017). Despite their role as community leaders was acknowledged, a gender perspective was yet to be accomplished in those previous works. In this regard, this study wanted to address their representation and their importance as agents of change. Habita – Association for the Right to Housing and to the City, running from 2005, shared some numbers from their attendances in Lisbon Area, between January 2018 and December 2019, that support this gendered struggle. With a mission based on the recognition, defense, and affirmation of the housing and urban rights, this association recognized that are mostly women that search for their support, coming from multiple municipalities of the Lisbon Area. In 276 attendances, they received 11 were couples, 46 men, and 219 women. Habita specified that, in the last years, problems in informal settlements and lack of conditions were supplanted by evictions in the private housing market and occupations of empty municipal flats, where women were the most affected (SAARISTO, 2022).

'How to stay home?' was done under the scope of intersectionality (CRENSHAW, 1989, 1991), relating housing precarity with the multiple identities and subjectivities of women, establish intersections between the different forms of discrimination of ethnic, minority, or subordinated groups, by understanding not only one factor of discrimination, but always assessing multiple aspects, since oppressions accumulate and are interdependent. Disclosing situations trigged or aggravated by the pandemic, the project revealed the critical role that architecture, urbanism, and housing policies can play in protecting the well-being and safety of those with the least conditions (LAGES & JORGE, 2020).

To gain access to the field and identify women meeting the criteria of housing precariousness we had the assistance of Habita. 'How to stay home?' categorized different situations within a broader universe: we in-depth interviewed ten women who live in very precarious housing conditions (unable to fulfill the social distance and hygiene conditions required in the pandemic), but also women who occupied municipal flats, evicted tenants, refugees, and Roma women. Most of them were deeply involved in the process of recognizing their urban rights, engaged in forms of housing struggles, with a growing awareness of their discrimination based on gender. This qualitative approach assumed an exploratory, and not absolute, character, without claiming to cover all possible angles, an impossible mission considering the scope of the problem and the specificity of each personal case. Focusing on the

58

**Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**

participants' experience with housing provision, and the pandemic, the interviews were semi structured, with open-ended questions, recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

HOUSING PRECARITY WITH A GENDER LENS

This section traces a panorama grounded on how housing precarity affects women, based on the in-depth interviews conducted between September and November, centered in Lisbon Metropolitan Area, here identified with two capital letters, guaranteeing the unanimously. The intention was to cover a diversity of situations that could reflect, under an intersectional approach, structural discriminations and oppressions that target women, and biased perceptions of certain social groups, under a context of housing precarity.

For this study we used recognized the seven elements of the right to adequate housing as per UN HABITAT definition (2009) : (1) legal security of tenure; (2) affordability; (3) habitability; (4) availability of services, materials, facilities, and infrastructure; (5) accessibility; (6) location; and (7) cultural adequacy. A graphic was produced to outline the major factors of inadequate housing that we found (figure 1), into a scale ranging from 0 to 10, corresponding 10 (at the perimeter) to lack/absence, and 0 (at the center) to a situation of full availability/convenience.

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

59

KEY

1. Legal security of tenure
2. Affordability
3. Habitability
4. Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure
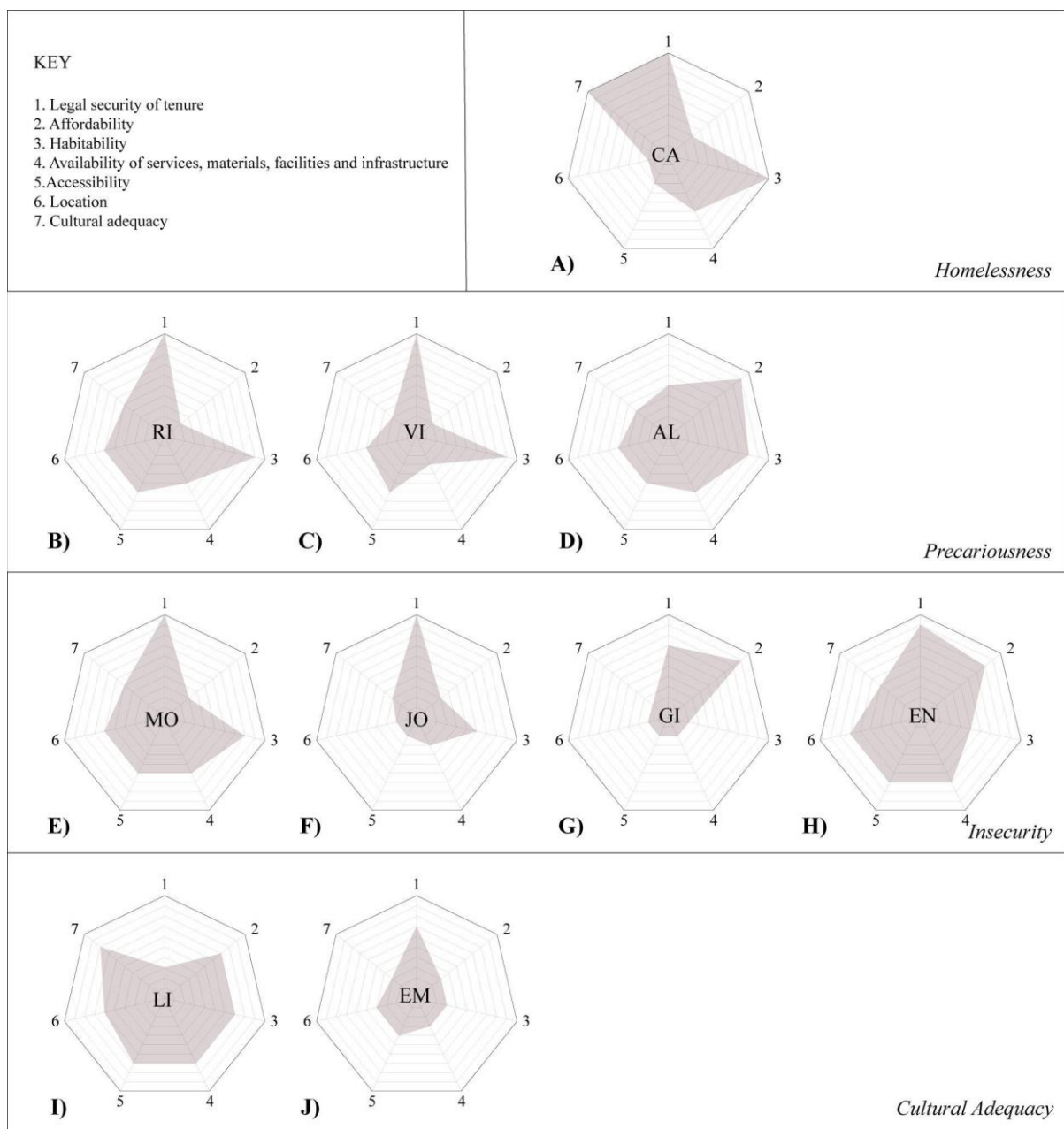5. Accessibility
6. Location
7. Cultural adequacy

Figure 1. Major factors of inadequate housing for the interviewed women.

Homelessness, insecurity, precariousness, and adequacy were dominant aspects to the conditions described. Therefore, our analysis was focused on those four categories: homelessness, precariousness, insecurity, and adequacy.

The most extreme situation is *homelessness*, a condition of extreme vulnerability when facing the new coronavirus. Staying at home when you don't have one was quickly addressed as problematic throughout 2020 (BENFER et al., 2021; MENDES, 2020a). Canada, Australia,

United States of America, or France, were some of the countries trying to control infections rates amongst the creation of temporarily housing to rough sleepers in motels, hotels, or built tends, until decent housing could be ready (PARSELL, CLARKE, & KUSKOFF 2020).

A series of events led CA to become a homeless woman. Unemployment and a consequent eviction from the house she rented, culminated in the separation from her son, sent to an institution. From the emergency shelters to the few nights where she slept on the street, CA reports both a distancing and ignorance of the institutions regarding the particularity of women experiencing homelessness. Few beds in shelters, lack of hygiene, strict timetable not suitable for those women who work, pushed her to other non-institutional responses.

The significantly lower number of women in this condition, 16%, according to the data from a national survey immediately prior to the pandemic (2018), indicates two issues. On the one hand, public policies are likely to be designed for a masculine profile, on the other hand, the absence of more accurate data leads to the underrepresentation of women experiencing homelessness in statistics, as well as solutions, as pointed out by Pleace (2016). Although less studied, this is a phenomenon that has also gained some attention in the Portuguese context, namely with Nobre's study (2021), focused on women and their experiences.

During the pandemic, in the emergency shelters in large spaces such as gyms, filled with camping beds, CA did not feel safe and protected from the virus, preferring to stay in the house she occupies, without basic infrastructures such as water or sanitation, quite degraded, but where she could feel somehow safer.

Following homelessness, a major category of inadequate housing that 'How to stay home?' mapped was *precariousness*, in its various forms. Two of the interviewed women live in 'slum' like neighborhoods, precarious constructions where the lack of basic infrastructure makes them and their families vulnerable to a sort of negative health outcomes. One place, Bairro da Torre, is located at Loures municipality, near Lisbon's airport. It has intermittent energy supply, no sanitation and deficient water supply. With demolition started in the 1990s, after a struggle led by a local resident's association, headed by a Santomean woman, RI (figure 1-B), there are still a dozen constructions left. This community leader said, 'until everyone has a decent house I'll be here'. When she got sick with COVID-19, RI and her family were isolated

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

61

in a precarious house, with no space for distancing and no social services support, apart from a 50 euros check.

The other location, Terras da Costa, was set at the south margin of the Tejo River, in Almada municipality. With no running water (only six taps provide water for 50 families), no sanitation, the place sits isolated from the urban fabric. We would expect that those two neighborhoods – Bairro da Torre and Terras da Costa –, who shelter mainly African migrants or their descendants, and Roma communities, could have a quick solution within the scope of the pandemic. Nothing happened.

Here, women like VI (figure 1-C), are overloaded with the burden of carrying water, making her daily tasks more demanding. The absence of street lighting makes them feel unsafe when they leave for commercial and hospital cleanings before dawn, a work that never stopped during the lockdowns, where many of them found a labor chance.

The third case that spans on precariousness, illustrates an increasing number of situations associated the free rental market, trigged by the touristification and the financialization of the real estate in Lisbon's city centre, leading to a rapid gentrification, or as Mendes posed supergentrification (2021). When her mother died, AL (figure 1-D) had thirty non-negotiable days to leave. Staying in Alfama, a typical neighborhood in central Lisbon taken by storm by Airbnb, was not affordable. She found a flat in a nearby degraded area, where she paid a rent of 400 euros with a substantial support of social services. With no previous notice, the subsidized rent stopped after twelve months. One can question: what type of public policy subsidizes rent for a flat with severe structural damage, with a slab at risk of collapse, no proper water supply? During our field work, social work assistants were interviewed, corroborating the instability of the financial aid provided by public money when it comes to housing precarity, aggravated when women have children. For those women it's not always clear until when, and how much, this help will last, in a border line between a dependent social intervention and the lack of housing policies. Housing needs are seen by the services as cycles of emergency, conducting to non-permanent solutions, therefore aggravating in the long term the situation of precariousness.

Those cases illustrate spatial precariousness, linked to the precariousness of labor conditions, low wages, low levels of formal education, and in the first two, a shared path of migration from Portuguese former colonized African countries. But they also underline the

62

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

divorce of institutional responses when it comes to housing: no multidimensional approach seems to be in place.

A third main category relates to *insecurity*. Insecurity, rooted in the fear of eviction, is something that MO (figure 1-E) experiences daily. She represents a growing number of women who occupied illegally empty municipal flats in Lisbon city in the past years, most of them single mother households. According to Habita, the NGO active in the Right to Housing which we referred to earlier, female headed families struggle to find proper accommodation while vacant flats in social housing estates remain unused. Habita supported this group of women, organizing a movement of struggle where MO and other women assumed their squatting at Lisbon's Municipal Assembly in 2018. Although MO distance herself from other type of squatters (youth and loan sharks, as described by some), saying she just wanted a house, by claiming her rights, she also gained a deeper understanding of her own citizenship and gender's construction through squatting (VAN DER STEEN, VAN ROODEN, & SNOEP, 2019, p. 5; WITTGER, 2017).

Left alone with two children, unemployed, with debts from her ex-partner, MO couldn't find another solution, she states. With no running water and illegal power supply, she constantly faces the day of her removal. Despite her illegal occupation, for the past fourteen years she has been applying to a municipal flat, but never obtained enough score according to the regulation. It may be argued that the reduced number of public housing dwellings is in fact the problem, not MO shortage of score, since Portugal presents one of the lower percentages of social housing in Europe, only 2% of all dwellings (INE, 2015).

Female headed families have, since 2009, extra score when applying to social housing in the municipality of Lisbon. Nonetheless, since the number of available dwellings is so low, if they're just slightly over the line they are still poor, but it is still too much to get a response as social housing. They are also statistically relevant: according to our latest census data (2021), single-headed households, 11% of the total, for a total of almost half million, are 85% headed by women.

As per JO (figure 1-F) and GI (figure 1-G), they both face the same fear of insecurity in the private rent housing market. While JO is a young woman with no family support and a letter of eviction, GI was forced to search for another home at the age of 81. Both struggle with a

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

63

housing cost burden higher than the standards recommend effort rates of up to 30%. They equally represent women that live alone, although in different stages of live, proving that young and old women battle for the right to live by themselves, in dignified conditions.

Being a refugee woman leads, many times, to housing insecurity. Responsible for supporting the integration of refugees in Portugal, the ACM (High Commission for Migration) established collaboration protocols with various host entities, to ensure technical and financial support during the first eighteen months to refugees. Despite the support given in this period, refugees reported many integration difficulties, starting with mastering the Portuguese language, but also in accessing employment, housing, and healthcare, among others. In fact, according to ACM data, from 2019, only 60% of the people remained in Portugal.

En and her family reflect these difficulties (figure 1-G). Fleeing from the war in Syria, they were among the first groups of refugees to arrive in Portugal under the European relocation program. Among the constraints encountered, she underlines the strangeness caused by cultural differences in the use of the veil, for example. Unable to prove her level of education, EN only found work as geriatric aide or as a cook, without a job contract. The long hours proved incompatible with her role of mother and caregiver, especially in the context of the pandemic. After the eighteen months of support guaranteed by ACM, without a job and without a guarantor, finding a home and covering monthly expenses became impossible. Thanks to the solidarity of other members of the Syrian community in Portugal, EN and her family are living in a borrowed house, a family of five sleeping in one bedroom. This case shows that it is necessary to address and define better integration policies, especially with a focus on refugee woman, to avoid isolation and dependence (ADAM et al., 2021).

Finally, *adequacy* should also be addressed, as a key factor to an adequate house. We highlight this subject with the case of a woman belonging to a very stigmatized social group regarding housing access: Roma people. A study on the characterization of housing conditions of Roma communities living in Portugal (IHRU, 2014), although outdated but still significant, identified circa three thousand families with severe housing needs, living in tents, campsites, or mobile homes. LI is a Roma woman (figure 1-I), whose family was relocated in 2016, a precarious neighborhood with no running water or sanitation.

Six kilometers separate LI's family previous location to the social housing estate where they live now. The separation of the household into different flats, in different streets,

64

**Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**

apparently resolved their housing precarity. In fact, with the rehousing process, their living conditions have improved, but other dimensions of personal and family life have changed substantially. Not enough interior space to accommodate family events, no external space, and no storage for the goods they sell in the markets. She also mentioned her peripheral position in relation to the urban centrality of her previous address.

Cultural adequacy is also a central factor in the life of the inhabitants of Bairro da Cova da Moura, a multi-ethnic neighborhood with a strong presence of Cape Verdeans, has in its heritage a morphology expressed in daily and cultural practices based on the permeable boundary between Europe and Africa. EM (figure 1-J), relates her identity closely linked to the neighborhood, to its construction in a regime of mutual aid (the Cape-Verdean practice of *djunta-mon*) (CUBEROS GALLARDO, 2014). The struggle of a neighborhood to remain, opposing the idea of *tabula rasa*, advocated by public local authorities (JORGE & CAROLINO, 2019). Adequacy, EM tells us, involves respecting models, and experiences that cohabit with difference. Both cases, like many others, highlight the urgency of thinking about differentiated housing policies, designed according to the diversity and specific needs of each community.

PRIORITIES FOR/FROM WOMEN

Concerning housing precarity, 'How to stay home?' identified three major dimensions to operate: temporal, spatial, and conceptual. A transverse key factor is the *temporal dimension*. Temporality appears as a disruptive factor that leads to the worsening of living conditions for many women. Reports of women waiting for more than a decade to have a decent (social) house, show us that policies and practices do not match the time of need and, generally, of urgency. It also shows that a small problem at first, like difficulties in paying the rent, will eventually end in an extreme situation, like homelessness, if not addressed properly.

In part, this stems from the absence of a gendered view of practices and policies. The fact that sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data is not systematized and available does not allow for comprehensive insights to the condition of gender equality in the housing realm.

As for the *spatial dimension*, the architectural expression must consider places and people, fostering solutions which promote the emancipation of girls, young women, and women, without erasing the identity that represents them. Access to decent housing is a key factor for

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

65

social inclusion, paving the way for other fundamental rights. In the case of the Roma population, other structural axes of their citizenship, such as health and education – with emphasis on the education of girls and women – only tend to become priorities when the need for housing has been met. Education is hardly seen as a priority if it's raining indoors, if there is an imminent risk of eviction, or if daily tasks are undermined by precarity: houses without basic infrastructure rob women of much of their time, concerning, for example, the transport of water. Houses without electricity or with poor facilities hardly encourage children and young people to study, making online classes hard or even impossible.

The inclusion of spatial elements that can also promote and sustain the practices of certain social groups are also a top priority, such as urban vegetable gardens for cultivation, places for raising animals, warehouse spaces (for the Roma earnings from selling in markets), can't also be ignored in future resettlements. Especially if they relate closely with income generation for women, already more disadvantaged as they are consistently poorer.

The *conceptual dimension* should not be underestimated when it comes to building better responses for women. Take the case of homeless women, to whom being homeless is more than just living on the street. The current definition of a homeless person does not reflect all the experiences of women in vulnerable contexts, as per the definition adopted in Portugal. Correspondingly, survivors of domestic violence who are living in shelters do not fit the definition of homelessness and are defined as a 'population at risk', even if they don't have a place to go. The enlargement of the concept of homeless people will encompass a larger number of situations of precarity that are currently under-covered and partially flagged as 'at risk'. The conceptual issue directly inquires established policies, through a stereotyped and masculinized vision of certain housing experiences. Broadening this conceptual dimension will unavoidably generate a more accurate representation of women, but above all, a fairer one. In this sense, understanding the dynamics of women's housing precarity, their structural and relational processes regarding conditions of discrimination and neglect, will also enhance some of the spatial practices of care that we find during the project: motherhood, resilience, and mutual aid.

As for next challenges, the Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) a strategic tool for the mitigation of the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic crisis, announced an unprecedented investment in housing sector in Portugal until 2026, as well as the promotion of equal opportunities and gender equality, including an action plan for preventing and combating

66

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

violence against women and domestic violence. This Plan intends to relaunch and reorientate housing policies, safeguarding housing for all, through the reinforcement of the public housing stock from 2% to 5%, until 2026. Comprising a National Plan of Urgent and Temporary Accommodation and First Right Program, to address people living in inadequate housing, the main challenge is to make it operational. For now, reality dribbles strategies to contour or minimize housing necessities and inequalities to 'stay at home'.

FINAL NOTES

How to 'stay at home?', both research and question, shows us that pandemic housing precariousness has grown and revealed persistent inequalities that disproportionately affect women. Worsening socio-territorial inequalities expose an unfair spatial model, which penalizes single-parent households headed by women, women living in precarious neighborhoods, and homeless women.

The weak responses given to women, due to a very low percentage of social housing (2%), lack of affordable housing provision, and social programs that are not aligned with housing responses (having a roof over one's head is not enough to have a decent life), reveal that most housing policies in Portugal are gender blind.

It is therefore time to think about a model where care is at the center of urban life (GUTIÉRREZ, 2021), turning this moment of global forced stoppage, and of European financial opportunity, into a new beginning. It is to be hoped that the 'Renovation Wave' announced, part of the European Green Deal, of which the Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan is a part, can ensure affordability and quality. Mainstreaming the Right to Housing into social policies and related national strategies will have to become 'the new normal', namely policies for fighting poverty and social exclusion, eradicating homelessness, or targeting particularly vulnerable groups.

Reimagining cities with a gender lens, so women can face less barriers to access a decent house, addresses the recognition of the multiple ways of being a woman living in precarity: the migration routes, the racial discrimination, the ageism in different stages, and lack of economic resources. It is therefore urgent that the women with whom the 'How to stay home?' project

Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396

67

has spoken, many of them in precarious conditions for years, can also take part and have an active voice. Their experiences and ways of life may determine the success, or failure, of more sustainable and inclusive rehousing. So far, some of these women have led movements fighting for the Right to Housing and have mobilized to make it happen. The evidence is the creation of the Women's Movement for the Right to Housing, during the pandemic, emphasizing that future research is required to improve effective solutions for housing precariousness.

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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68

**Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**

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69

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70

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Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**

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Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**

71

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72

**Sociedade e Território – Natal. Vol. 35, N. 1, p. 51-72
Jan./Abr. de 2023 / ISSN: 2177-8396**