A promising housing market in Limburg for or due to Polish labor immigrants?
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Housing requirements of the Polish labor immigrants in Limburg

To determine the adequacy of every other housing situation we asked our survey group for their housing needs, which were provided a score on every defined characteristic that represents the level of adequacy for that specific characteristic.

Quality of Polish labor immigrants' current housing situation

To be able to determine to what extend the current housing situation corresponds to desired housing situation in general we first measured the overall level of satisfaction with the current housing situation and the tendency among the group to relocate, generally a good indicator. It appears that approximately half of the group is satisfied with their current housing, but at the same time, more than ninety percent of the group has the intention to relocate.

As a result, the proportion of Polish labor immigrants in the Dutch labor market continuously grows (CBS Statline, 2020) since 2000. This trend can be spotted all across Europe.

Recent studies show a large proportion of the Polish labor immigrants that resides in The Netherlands is not satisfied with their current housing situation (Weltewerde, De Boom, Rezai, Zuiderwijk & Enbersen 2009). The media in Limburg, a province in the south of The Netherlands, regularly reports on the housing of labor immigrants. In most cases this concerns shared housing that does not meet legislative or statutory guidelines. In some situations reported living standards even show signs of slavery. Whenever the landlords, mostly employers, are taken responsible in these situations, they often use the lack of suitable legal housing as the main argument for defense. Also, the demand for low budget and low quality housing standards by Polish labor immigrants is often used as an argument by landlords. The Polish labor immigrant does not participate in these discussions and is rarely heard at all.

“...There is a hunger for more insight into the housing situation of Polish immigrants and the demand for immigrant housing in Limburg.”

Limburg resides a lot of Polish labor immigrants. Based on unceasing media attention in Limburg, the public attention for this topic increases. The situation appears to evolve to a social housing problem that needs to be solved. Governments and social housing companies are therefore feeling more and more challenged to take a position in this issue. There is a hunger for more insight into the housing situation of Polish labor immigrants and the demand for immigrant housing in Limburg. It seems obvious that the Polish labor immigrants are the main focus in this study.

Problem diagnosis and research design

The aforementioned designation shows a clear problem in the housing of Polish labor immigrants in Limburg. This article will try to answer how can be determined whether improving of housing conditions of Polish labor immigrants in Limburg, judged from the housing demands of this group, is necessary and possible? The knowledge that is required to answer this aforementioned question is provided through research on the following topics:

- definition and personal characteristics of the Polish labor immigrants in Limburg;
- housing requirements of the Polish immigrants in Limburg;
- quality of Polish labor immigrants’ current housing situation;
- adequacy of the alternative existing housing supply in Limburg;
- any factors outside the housing supply that influences the possibility for the Polish labor immigrant to relocate.

Extensive research was performed to give insight in these issues. Different research methods were applied, for example: secondary analyses, a literature study, interviews and quantitative analyses based on a survey conducted under 172 Polish labor immigrants, where each survey contained 92 questions. Figure 1 shows the research design and provides a structural overview of the reviews, which research methods are used and how the combined outcome leads to the required answer to our problem definition.

Research

Personal characteristics of the Polish labor immigrants in Limburg

This study relates to the group of Polish labor immigrants living in Limburg between May 20, 2010 en June 25, 2010. In this period we estimate the total population of Polish labor immigrants in Limburg to be around 15,000 people, based on information provided by the municipalities in Limburg. For this study we are generally interested in the qualitative and quantitative housing demands of the group. Nevertheless, more insight in the group characteristics is needed to observe the interaction between this group and the housing market. Therefore individual characteristics like gender, age, working situation and income are collected. The average age of our group is approximately 32 years. Slightly more Polish women are situated in Limburg than Polish men, and over half of all Polish labor immigrants live together with their partner and/or their children. The average family counts 1.7 persons.

Taken into account the reduction of housing costs the majority of people earn less than €1,500 a month. Only a limited number of people earn more than the statutory minimum wage of €1,500 but not more than €2,500 a month. On average, a Polish labor immigrant in Limburg already resides 168 weeks in the Netherlands, and slightly less than half of the group came to The Netherlands for the first time in 2009 or later. There appears to exist a group ‘shuttle immigrants’ who returned to The Netherlands more than ten times since their first arrival. Over half of all Polish labor immigrants in Limburg wants to settle permanently in The Netherlands.

Quality of Polish labor immigrants’ current housing situation

To be able to determine to what extent the current housing situation corresponds to desired housing situation in general we first measured the overall level of satisfaction with the current housing situation and the tendency among the group to relocate, generally a good indicator. It appears that approximately half of the group is satisfied with their current housing, but at the same time, more than ninety percent of the group has the intention to relocate.

For a more specific determination we used our model. The outcome of our model shows that the hunger to relocate is based on a current housing situation that only slightly meets the group requirements. More than half of the Polish labor immigrants have to share their dwelling, rooms or facilities and would rather not do so. Only few are willing to share their bedroom, while a vast majority of the Polish labor immigrants in current situation have to do so with two or three other, usually not related, persons. Furthermore, most of the people strongly prefer a dwelling in or near the centre of a town or village, while many of them currently live isolated on the countryside, at recreation parks or on the working site. A Polish labor immigrant in Limburg pays around an average of €725 for each m² of facilities in case the bedroom is shared with others. This equals the price that the group is willing to pay for housing facilities that meets their requirements. In general these requirements can be defined as a private bedroom and private sanitary facilities.

The unification of the European Union progresses rapidly. Poland joined the European Union May 1, 2004, which meant that Polish inhabitants were free to migrate across Europe. Due to the Dutch and European legislation the Polish people are allowed to stay and work in the Netherlands without needing additional permits. In fact, their legal status equals that of Dutch natives. This situation creates an influx of Polish workers, also called labor immigrants, to the Netherlands.

Ir. E.W.B. Loeff, Dr. J.J.A.M. Smeets & Ir. L.A.M.C. van de Ven

Ewout Loeff graduated in December, 2010 in the department of Real Estate Management and Development at the University of Technology Eindhoven. After working as a project manager with different companies, he currently is owner of the project development bureau Loeff R&PS BV. During his graduation research, he was directed by Jos Smeets (Associate Professor REM&D) and Leonie van de Ven (assistant professor REM&D).
Adequacy of the alternative existing housing supply in Limburg

Based on a global analysis of the existing housing supply in Limburg, it can be concluded that only for a small part of the group the sufficient requirements can be met. Most of these cases concern Polish labor immigrants who require low budget self-contained housing. Mainly based on budget requirements almost this entire group is reliant on the social housing market.

Due to the lack of available shared housing in Limburg, the requirements of Polish labor immigrants who seek shared housing in most cases will not be met. Existing shared housing is mainly used institutionally for healthcare or other social functions. In Figure 3 the quantitative demand for additional housing in Limburg is shown. Only the typology shared/self-contained is used as a characteristic.

“These package deals make an immigrant almost a ‘hostage’ of his employer.”

Additional factors that influence relocation capabilities

Out of the interviews and the survey amongst the research group we conclude that, besides the language barrier, the relationship between the Polish labor immigrant and its employer in general is a very influential factor considering the immigrant’s capability to relocate. In most cases the employer is also the landlord and housing is part of the temporary employment contract. These package deals make an immigrant almost a ‘hostage’ of his employer.

### FIGURE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Level characteristics</th>
<th>Sub Level characteristics</th>
<th>Score on main level</th>
<th>Score on sub level</th>
<th>Maximum score on main level</th>
<th>Maximum score on sub level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing type</td>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-contained/shared</td>
<td>private house</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical position</td>
<td>private house</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities around the residence</td>
<td>private house</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of housing</td>
<td>shared house</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>n.v.t.</td>
<td>n.v.t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooms</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>n.v.t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garage</td>
<td></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size living room</td>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared rooms</td>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size kitchen</td>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size bedroom</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities inside the house</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet</td>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>n.v.t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of kitchen</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>not to determine</td>
<td>n.v.t.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total rent of the facility</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FIGURE 3

Due to the lack of available shared housing in Limburg, the requirements of Polish labor immigrants who seek shared housing in most cases will not be met. Existing shared housing is mainly used institutionally for healthcare or other social functions. In Figure 3 the quantitative demand for additional housing in Limburg is shown. Only the typology shared/self-contained is used as a characteristic.

### FIGURE 3

Qualitative demand for additional housing in Limburg

The second group is willing to share a dwelling with other, not related people. This type of housing, which fits the requirements of this group, does not seem to be available yet. The study shows that there is a demand of approximately 2,500 units in Limburg. Considering the rent this group is willing to pay, it is expected that developers will be eager to develop this type of housing once the Polish labor immigrants gain free access to this market.

**Conclusion**

At the moment, a lack of sufficient suitable supply of housing in Limburg can be detected. Two groups with very different demands can be distinguished.

“Unless a social housing association targets them as their primary group, this market is very hard to access for the Polish labor immigrants.”

The first group would like to reside in a regular low budget self-contained family dwelling. Most of these people intend to settle permanently in the Netherlands. Due to their low income this group is depending heavily on the social housing market for their housing needs. Unless a social housing association targets them as their primary group, this market is very hard to access for the Polish labor immigrants.

The overall population in Limburg is shrinking, housing association must carefully plan their developments.

So yes, the housing condition of the Polish labor immigrant needs to be improved. Unfortunately only a minority will also be able to do so, mainly due to their ‘hostage’ situation.

Improving the housing condition of Polish immigrants in Limburg only seems to be possible when Polish labor immigrants are entitled to an independent and equal access to the Limburg housing market, so that this market will be able to evolve.

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**FIGURE 2** Score sheet adequacy model

**FIGURE 3** Qualitative demand for additional housing in Limburg