

A guide to finding a home in England

Have you been granted any of the following statuses on your asylum application?

- Refugee status
- Humanitarian protection
- Discretionary leave

If you have one of the above statuses and are homeless or about to become homeless, this leaflet provides information to help you find a place to live.

Important note: If you are currently accommodated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), you only have a maximum of 28 days to find alternative accommodation.

How can I get housing advice?

You should first go to the housing services of the local authority, also called local council, in the area you are staying in for advice. If you don't know where the local authority housing department is, you can ask at any advice centre, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or the public library or at a refugee charity, such as the Refugee Council. Try to arrange an appointment with them beforehand. When you go, you must take with you:

- the letter you received from the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), which granted you the status; and
- the notice from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) which says that you need to leave the accommodation NASS is currently providing you – the notice could be a NASS35 form or the letter you received from NASS asking you to leave the accommodation; and
- any other personal information you may have, such as medical information.

The housing services at your local authority will be able to advise you about your options to find a home, and about what benefits you can access. The most important benefits they will tell you about are:

- Housing benefit (this will help cover most if not all of your rent)
- Jobseeker's allowance or income support
- Council tax benefit

They will ask you to fill in a form called the pre-tenancy determination form. This helps them to assess whether you will be entitled to housing benefit. They should also tell you about other help you might be able to get, for example, financial help to buy furniture or help to put forward a rent deposit if you are planning to rent accommodation from a private landlord.

What housing options are available to me? **Local authority housing**

You should go to a special department in your local authority called housing advisory service or housing needs. The staff at the local authority will assess your situation to find out whether there is any reason why you should be given priority for local authority housing, if, for example, you have dependant children or a physical disability. If this is the case, they may give you temporary accommodation, until more permanent local authority housing becomes available. This can often take a long time because there is not much local authority housing available. Ask your housing adviser about how long he or she thinks it might take.

If the housing adviser decides that s/he cannot prioritise your case and allocates you local authority housing quickly, he or she should still advise you about other options to find housing. You should ask for your name to be put on a list called the local housing register. The housing adviser will ask you to complete a special form for this. Ask for help if you feel your English is not good enough.

If you are already on the local housing register, the local authority may be able to offer you accommodation, although this can take a long time, sometimes up to several years. Although you can present yourself as homeless to any local authority, some areas have more available housing than others. It may be that the local authority is able to offer you accommodation more quickly in another area. This means that if you think you can be flexible about where exactly you want to live, you may be able to get local authority housing much more quickly.

Many people who are unemployed or live on very low wages, apply for local authority housing and there are usually always more people needing housing than there is housing available. Rent for local authority housing is usually very low and the accommodation is usually unfurnished.

Housing associations or renting with registered social landlords

Housing associations are non-profit making housing providers who rent their accommodation on a long-term basis. Rent is affordable, but normally higher than for local authority housing. If you want to apply for accommodation with a housing association, make sure your housing adviser at the local authority housing services gives you a list of housing associations. You then need to go to the individual housing association you want to apply for and register, or put your name on their waiting list.

If you want to rent accommodation offered by a registered social landlord, this could be accommodation in a hostel or shared accommodation, where sometimes food may be provided as well. Ask your housing adviser for details and how to be referred to a registered social landlord.

Rent for full-board accommodation is often quite high. This option may only be advisable for a short period of time until you get your benefits sorted out or are able to work.

Private rented accommodation

You can also find accommodation from private landlords. There are many ways in which you can find privately rented accommodation: the local newspapers, in shop windows such as newsagents. You can even go to an estate agent who specialises in letting accommodation, but they will normally charge an extra administration fee for their service. Make sure you only pay them once you have signed a tenancy agreement for accommodation offered by them.

Not all landlords accept tenants who rely on housing benefit to cover the rent, so check first. If you need to claim benefits, go to your local housing benefit department once you have found accommodation, and complete a form called the pre-tenancy determination form. This helps them to assess your entitlement to housing benefit.

Most private landlords normally also ask for a deposit before you move into the accommodation. The deposit is usually one month's rent, although amounts can vary. You should be able to get the deposit back at the end of your tenancy. If you need financial help with a deposit, you can ask your housing adviser to tell you about any rent deposit schemes that you may be able to access in your area.

If you rent accommodation from a private landlord, you will need to know about your legal rights. The national UK housing charity Shelter can advise you about your rights as a tenant (contact details are at the end of this leaflet).

If you have been supported by NASS, and you have still not found a place to live a few days before NASS evicts you, you should contact the housing advisory service in your local authority for advice. They should give you advice even if they do not find that you are homeless under UK housing law or in priority need. They may, for example, be able to give you lists of private landlords or hostels.

Help with living costs

If you need help with living costs, you need to take your Home Office decision letter and the NASS letter informing you about your NASS support being terminated (or your NASS 35) to your local jobcentre plus office as soon as possible.

There, you can apply for a benefit called jobseekers' allowance. If you are in low paid work, you may be entitled to income-based jobseekers' allowance and housing and council tax benefit. You also need to apply for a national insurance number (if you have not already been allocated one). You will need this number to get paid your benefits or to get paid from your employer when you find work.

Help with furniture

If you need furniture and you are in receipt of benefits (in the form of jobseekers' allowance or income-based job seekers' allowance), pick up an application form for a community care grant from your local jobcentre plus office. A community care grant is money that can be awarded to you to buy some essential furniture. Take the form to your local CAB or another advice centre or community group to help you complete it.

Where can I find more information?

Your local authority housing services should be your first point of contact for help and advice about finding a home.

However, you can also ask for advice at a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Each town or city will have a number of those. There is also a charity specialising in housing advice called Shelter. You can phone them free of charge 24 hours a day on 0808 800 4444. They will try and arrange a telephone interpreter if you need one. You can also find their information on their website at:

www.shelter.org.uk