

Housing Guide

Finding a place to live after you've been granted refugee status

Who is this guide for?

This Guide has been written to help people with new refugee status and those that support them to find somewhere safe to live. It has been created by Boaz Trust, with input from people who have been through the process of trying to find somewhere to live after they were granted refugee status.

Introduction

Once you get a decision on your asylum claim, your asylum accommodation will end and you will need to find somewhere else to stay very quickly. Everyone has their own story of how they found somewhere to live when they got their refugee status. Many single people or couples with no children become homeless after getting their refugee status.

In the UK you are classed as homeless if you do not have a place to call home. You do not have to be sleeping on the streets to be classed as homeless. You might be sleeping outside on the street, or in a tent, or you might be staying in someone else's house or room. Knowing where to go to ask for help is important. It is good to start thinking about this as soon as possible. This Guide offers information on:

1. How local councils can help people who are homeless.
2. What to expect when looking for private rented housing.
3. Other important things to consider when you settle in a new area.

Can the local council help me?

If you are going to be homeless, tell your local council and ask for help. The local council is responsible for an area like a town or a city. You should contact the council responsible for where you live when you receive your asylum decision - you can find your local council here: [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council)

Once you have leave to remain, you can choose to live anywhere in the UK. If you move to a different area and become homeless, then your new local council will not have a legal duty to help you. They may advise you to return back to the area you were granted refugee status. **You should therefore contact the local council in the place where you were living when you received your papers.**

What will happen if I contact my local council?

Your local council should give you a **Homelessness Assessment**. This is when they decide if they have a duty to help (and house) you. They will give you an appointment either in person or on the phone where they will ask you some questions. You should have some documents ready for this, like you and your family's eVisa(s), asylum decision letter, any letters from your doctor about physical or mental health conditions. After this, the local council will send you an email or a letter which explains their decision.

After your Homelessness Assessment, if the local council confirm that they will help, they will give you a **personalised housing plan**. It will tell you what help they can give you as well as information about private rented accommodation and where you can go for extra help. If you have children with you, or if you are single but have care and support needs that make you vulnerable, they should offer you accommodation. This might be emergency accommodation or a night shelter.

If you are generally healthy and if you do not have children living with you, the local council will be unlikely to offer you any accommodation. There isn't enough housing in the UK and lots of families and individuals are in homelessness accommodation, waiting for somewhere else to stay. This means that more people are homeless and end up sleeping on the streets. This can be dangerous, but even if you are sleeping on the streets, the council still may not be able to offer you a place to live.

If the local council offer you any accommodation, remember:

- A** – Accept what they offer you, you might not get another offer if you say no.
- B** – Next, take time to plan for something that feels better. This might be a shared house.
- C** – Work towards a comfortable home, somewhere you would like to live for a longer time.

What is social housing?

Local councils used to provide long-term homes for people that were good quality and low cost. Now, this housing (also called social housing) is very scarce and usually provided by Housing Associations.

There are many, many people waiting for social housing. In some cities, you might have to wait 10 years before you are offered social housing. People can get social housing faster if they have vulnerabilities or for a few different reasons – your nationality will not affect this. You can apply to join the social housing waiting list in the town or city where you were living when you got your refugee status, but in some places you have to wait for a period of time (e.g. 2 years) before you can register.

What to expect from private rented accommodation

In the UK, it is very common for people to rent their home from private landlords who might own lots of houses. Some people live in a shared house where they have their own bedroom but share the living spaces, kitchen and bathroom with other adults. In a shared house, furniture and large electrical items (fridge, washing machine) are usually provided.

When you are looking for a place to rent, you need to think about the cost, the location and the type of property where you want to live. It is really important you think carefully – or get good advice – on what kind of place you can afford. When you have found somewhere to rent, before you move in you will have to:

- Sign a tenancy agreement. This is your legal agreement with your landlord. It's important that you read this carefully and understand the document. Organisations like Shelter ([shelter.org.uk](https://www.shelter.org.uk)) can help you with this.
- Provide a share code to prove that you have a right to rent. You can get a share code by logging into your UKVI account or by visiting gov.uk/prove-right-to-rent
- Pay a deposit. This is usually the cost of one month's rent, on top of the first month's rent payment in advance.
- You might need to give references from people who know you, too.

What about paying rent and bills?

You usually pay rent to the landlord in advance every month. Usually this is on top of bills like electricity, water and gas.

If you get Universal Credit (benefits) you need to tell them when you find a new home and have to pay rent. They decide how much extra they will give you to help you pay your rent. The amount you get is based on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and it can be different depending on your age, who you live with and rent costs in your local area. Rent costs can be very different in different areas and Universal Credit is not usually enough to pay for your rent. Try to find out where housing is cheaper. This is usually in smaller towns or further away from the city centre.

Get help

You might be able to apply for a Refugee Integration Loan (gov.uk/refugee-integration-loan) for between £100-£500 (for a single person) and this can be used to help toward a deposit, rent or essential items for your home. The local council where you live may also be able to help with deposit or rent payments for the first few months.

Where do I find a place to rent?

- **Online:** Websites like Zoopla, Rightmove, SpareRoom, DSSmove and Gumtree list rooms and properties for rent.
- **Estate Agents:** Visit local estate agents like Your Move, Reed, Rains, Purple Bricks to see available properties and get advice. They often have offices on the high street and advertise rooms and houses in their windows.
- **Newsagents and local shops:** They might have small cards in the window advertising rooms for rent.
- **Community Groups:** Local faith and community groups may have information about local housing options or landlords.

Finding somewhere to rent takes a lot of time. There are a lot of people looking for places to live. **Keep trying.**

- **Your friends:** Ask people in your community if they know any landlords with a spare room or house for rent. Ask your friends if they would like to look for a shared house with you.

Be careful! If you see adverts on social media for rented accommodation, don't pay any money until you are sure that it is a real offer. If you are unsure, ask for help.

Becoming a tenant

There are lots of things to think about when you are starting to rent somewhere to live.

- **Utilities:** You'll usually need to set up gas, electricity, water, and internet accounts.
- **Council Tax:** You'll probably have to pay council tax to your local council.
- **Insurance:** Get contents insurance to protect your belongings. Landlord's insurance covers the building, not the things you own.
- **Bills:** You should pay all your bills on time to avoid late fees and a bad credit score. You can set up direct debits so that bills are paid automatically each month.
- **Property maintenance:** It is important that you keep the place clean and tidy - inside and outside, including any garden or yard areas. You should report any repairs needed to your landlord immediately.
- **Respect your neighbours:** Be considerate with noise levels, especially at night.
- **Landlord's expectations:** Follow the rules in your tenancy agreement. Communicate with your landlord if you have any questions or problems. Landlords usually have the right to inspect the property (with notice).
- **Moving out:** Check your tenancy agreement to see how much notice you need to give your landlord before you move out. Make sure the property is clean and in good condition to get your deposit back.

Know your rights! As a private tenant you are protected by law. Your home should be safe, good quality and you should not be evicted without good reason. You can find advice on this from Shelter by scanning the QR code.

SHELTER



What about my family?

RED CROSS



When someone is granted refugee status, they might want to bring their family to join them through a Family Reunion Visa. The British Red Cross can help with this process (redcross.org.uk/get-help/family-reunion). It is really important to **think about housing before you apply for Family Reunion** to make sure your family don't end up homeless when they arrive.

It can be difficult, as a family home will be much more expensive than a single room in a shared house. The local council will not offer you a family home before your family arrive, even if you have children. If your family suddenly arrive in the UK, there is still no guarantee that you will be offered a home together. It is important to think about this, get advice early and to have a realistic plan.

If you are a couple without children, it can still be very difficult to find a place to stay together if you are homeless. Sometimes there may be emergency accommodation spaces for women or men only, so it is best not to rely on homelessness accommodation if any family members are coming to the UK.

What else do I need to think about?

- **Open a bank account:** HSBC, Lloyds and Nationwide are often helpful: citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/banking/getting-a-bank-account
- **Money:** apply for benefits as soon as you can. You can apply for benefits here: gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim
- **Find a job:** if you are able to work, start looking for a job as soon as possible. You can find your nearest job centre here: find-your-nearest-jobcentre.dwp.gov.uk/search.php
- **Register for healthcare** with a local GP: nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp

What can I do to feel settled in my new community?

Greater Manchester is lucky to be home to many diverse communities from all over the world, but it can still take time to feel settled and at home. Luckily, there are lots of things you can do to help with this but if you feel a bit lost, make sure you ask for support.

- **Explore your local area:** visit parks and museums, find out about local buses.
- **Find your local library:** as well as books, newspapers and a warm quiet space, they have Wi-Fi, computers and useful local information.
- **Practise English:** if you aren't confident speaking English, find English classes through your local college, council or community group.
- **Find community and things to do:** look out for local community organisations and charities in the area, especially groups that work with refugees and groups where you can volunteer. A local church, mosque or other faith community would also be a good place to start.

Organisations who can help

Kompasi: a directory of local migrant, refugee, and asylum support services in Greater Manchester | kompasi.org

Shelter: national charity with local branches offering advice and support around housing and homelessness | england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

Greater Manchester Law Centre: free independent legal advice on a range of topics including housing | gmlaw.org.uk

We know that this is a lot of information but we hope it is helpful and that you soon feel comfortable in your new home.

This information was produced in March 2025. We will do our best to update this guidance on our website as things can change quickly.