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Tenancy rights

This information is for people renting privately in Northern Ireland.

Types of tenancies

It's important to know what kind of tenancy you have. You have different rights depending on your tenancy type.

Your tenancy type may change over time and not match what your agreement says. The terms of your agreement determine what kind of tenant you are, not the name of the agreement.

[Speak to our advisers](#) if you're not sure what kind of tenant you are.

As a private tenant, you might be interested in taking part in [Renters' Voice](#). Renters' Voice is supported by Housing Rights. It's a group of people who rent privately in Northern Ireland that works to influence landlords, politicians, and government to make private renting better for everyone.

Fixed term or periodic tenancy

Fixed term tenancies have a start and end date. Check your tenancy agreement to see when your tenancy ends. You must keep to your agreement for the entire term. It's sometimes called a fixed term agreement.

In most cases, at the end of the fixed term either:

- you may sign a new tenancy agreement with your landlord which will have another fixed term or
- the tenancy will become a periodic tenancy

Periodic tenancies do not have a set end date. If you pay a month's rent, that is how long your tenancy is for. It's sometimes called a 'rolling' or 'month-to-month' tenancy. It continues until either:

- the landlord ends the tenancy by following [the correct process](#) or
- the [tenant ends the tenancy](#)

Tenant, licensee or subtenant

Not everyone who pays rent to a landlord is a tenant. Tenants, licensees and subtenants all have different rights. Tenants have more rights than licensees and subtenants.

Tenants typically:

- pay rent to their landlord at regular times
- have a contract saying how long the tenancy will last
- are entitled to notice from their landlord to enter the tenant's home (or room)
- are entitled to written notice to quit from their landlord

Licensees typically:

- rent a room in their landlord's home
- get extra services from their landlord such as cleaning, cooking or laundry
- are not entitled to notice from their landlord to enter the tenant's home (or room)
- do not get a written notice to quit from their landlord
- cannot make changes to their space

Examples of licensees include, if you live:

- in student halls of residence
- in temporary housing, such as a hostel
- with friends or family and do not have a written agreement
- in housing your employer provides and you'll lose your home if you lose your job

A lodger rents a room in a property they share with their landlord. A lodger can be a tenant or a licensee. It depends on the practical arrangements in place, not only what is in the contract.

Make sure to check your agreement. Even if it's called a licence agreement, or refers to you as a licensee, what matters are the actual terms. You could be a tenant, which means you have more rights. [Speak to an adviser](#) if you're not sure whether you're a licensee or tenant.

Subtenants typically:

- rent from someone who is a tenant
- are in shared housing

For example, a landlord rents out a property to one person and that tenant sublets a room in the property to you.

As a subtenant, you have the same rights as the tenant. Your rights end when the tenant moves out. If you rent from a tenant, make sure they have permission from the landlord to rent to subtenants. If they do not have permission and the landlord evicts them, you'll be evicted too.

Protected tenancy

If you're a protected tenant:

- the amount of rent you have to pay will be limited
- you cannot be evicted as easily as most private tenants
- you may be able to pass on your tenancy when you die

Most tenancies are not protected. Since 1 April 2007, no new protected tenancies have been created. It can be difficult to work out if you're a protected tenant.

You may be a protected tenant if:

- you moved into the property before 1 April 2007
- your home was built or converted for letting before 1956
- your home was first rented out before 1978
- a tenant was living in the property in October 1978

You can [check the Rent Register](#) to see if you are in a protected tenancy. [Speak to our advisers](#) if your home is not on the Rent Register and you think it is a

protected tenancy.

Inheriting a protected tenancy

If a protected tenant dies, they may be able to pass the tenancy on to a:

- spouse or
- civil partner.

If there isn't a surviving spouse or civil partner, then a family member may inherit the tenancy. In all cases, they must have been living at the property with the tenant for at least six months prior to their death.

If you are a protected tenant and your landlord is trying to evict you, [speak to our advisers](#) or a solicitor.

What happens when a tenant dies

If a tenant has passed away, you may be unsure about what happens to their tenancy and belongings.

A tenancy is part of a person's estate. If someone dies while a private tenant:

- their tenancy and belongings will pass to their personal representative
- rent will need to be paid until the tenancy comes to an end

The tenant's personal representative will be responsible for handling their estate. The tenant's estate is everything they leave behind when they die. A personal representative is:

- an executor or administrator of the estate
- can be a family member or friend

Rent will continue to be due until the tenancy ends. The personal representative can:

- decide to surrender the tenancy (rent will no longer be due)
- make arrangements for the tenant's belongings
- decide who to allow to enter the property
- arrange for the return of the deposit (minus reasonable deductions)
- take over the tenancy if they choose

The landlord or estate agent cannot:

- enter the property without permission
- throw away the tenant's belongings
- relet the property if the current tenancy has not ended. It can only be ended by surrender or by the [correct legal process](#)
- change the locks

[Get advice](#) if this has happened.

The [local council](#) will have an environmental health department. They can investigate [illegal eviction and harassment](#) in private tenancies.

Repairs for private tenants

You can find information on this [here](#).

Problems with neighbours

You can find information on this in our [antisocial behaviour section](#).

More advice

- [Finding a private rental](#)
- [Ending a private tenancy](#)
- [Deposits, rent and fees](#)