Housing Rights

https://www.housingrights.org.uk/housing-advice/housing-advice/people-seeking-asylum

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People seeking asylum

This information is for people living in Northern Ireland.

This information is for people in the asylum process in Northern Ireland.

You can get housing if you:

- have made an asylum claim, and
- are entitled to asylum support

The Home Office, part of the UK government, is responsible for housing for asylum seekers. In Northern Ireland, Mears provides asylum housing on behalf of the Home Office.

Your accommodation will change when a decision is made on your asylum claim.

There is specific accommodation for people seeking asylum who are under 18.

Housing Rights cannot give immigration advice. You should only get immigration advice from someone who is:

- registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), or
- a member of an approved professional body

Asylum housing in Northern Ireland

If you're living in asylum accommodation, you're a 'licensee'. This means you have permission, or a licence, to live there.

But you do not have the same rights as someone renting from a private or social landlord. You should get a document explaining your rights and responsibilities.

There are different types of asylum accommodation, including:

- hotels
- hostels
- shared houses
- self-contained flats or houses

The housing you live in depends on:

- who lives with you as part of your family, and
- what stage you're at in the asylum process

Contact Migrant Help to report repairs or a problem with your housing, for example if:

- your heating is not working
- there is water leaking in your home
- an appliance like a cooker or washing machine is broken

You do not need to pay rent or utility bills in asylum accommodation.

Staying in a hotel or hostel

When you first apply for asylum, you might stay in a hotel or hostel. This is sometimes called 'initial' or 'contingency' accommodation.

If you're living in a hotel, food is provided. You cannot use a kitchen to make your own meals.

You might have to stay there for a few weeks or months. If the Home Office decides that you qualify for full asylum support, you'll move into longer-term housing. This is often called 'dispersal' accommodation.

Sharing a house

Single people and couples usually live in a room in a shared house throughout the asylum process. This type of accommodation is often called a HMO, or house in multiple occupation.

In a shared house, you have your own bedroom. But you have to share areas including a kitchen, bathroom and living room.

Living in a self-contained flat or house

Families with children usually live in a flat or house and do not share facilities.

Young people seeking asylum

Social services are responsible for finding housing for people seeking asylum who:

- are under 18, and
- have no family in the UK

Contact your local health and social care trust for more information.

Leaving asylum accommodation

You can usually stay in asylum housing until you get a final decision on your asylum claim from the Home Office or a court.

Where you live afterwards depends on whether you get a positive or negative decision.

If you get a positive decision

If your asylum claim is successful, you'll get 'leave to remain'. This includes:

- refugee status
- discretionary leave
- humanitarian protection

Getting leave to remain means you need to:

1. leave asylum accommodation within 28 days of getting your decision letter
2. ask the Housing Executive for temporary accommodation
3. apply for social security benefits to help pay rent

Prepare for asylum support ending

You'll get a 'discontinuation' letter from the Home Office. It will tell you that your asylum support will stop 28 days after you receive your decision letter. As of January 2026, the 28-day rule applies to all asylum households.

You'll also get an eviction notice, or 'notice to quit', from Mears. This will tell you the date you need to leave your asylum accommodation.

Talk to your Mears welfare support officer if you think it will be hard for you to leave. For example, if anyone in your household has a disability or serious medical condition.

Contact the Housing Executive

The Housing Executive helps people who have nowhere to live in Northern Ireland. They'll check if you qualify for homelessness support. This process is called a homelessness assessment.

Contact the Housing Executive as soon as you get your decision letter.

If you do not have a biometric residence permit (BRP) yet, you'll need to show your:

- application registration card (ARC), and
- asylum decision letter from the Home Office

Find 'temporary' accommodation

The Housing Executive should offer you temporary accommodation. It's 'temporary' because you will not get permanent accommodation until you have enough housing points. Contact Housing Rights if you are not offered temporary accommodation.

Temporary accommodation can be in a hostel, flat or house, depending on your circumstances. It can be anywhere in Northern Ireland.

Get advice if you think the temporary accommodation you're offered does not meet your needs.

Turning down a temporary accommodation offer is a risk as you might:

- have to wait a few weeks until you get another offer, and
- not have anywhere else to stay during this time

If you want to challenge the offer, you must first accept it and then ask the Housing Executive to review the offer.

Contact Housing Rights for advice on challenging a temporary accommodation offer.

Get support to apply for housing benefits

You need to pay rent in temporary accommodation. You'll need to apply for Housing Benefit to help pay the rent.

If you live in the greater Belfast area, Extern Refugee Floating Support Service can help you to apply for benefits to pay rent.

You can also get advice from Migrant Help and Law Centre NI.

If you get a negative decision

If your asylum claim is refused, you'll need to leave asylum housing within 21 days of your claim being decided.

If children live with you, you can usually stay in asylum housing until you leave the UK.

You may be able to get short-term help with housing if you are:

- single, and
- unable to leave the UK

This is a complex issue and the housing support you can get depends on your immigration status. You should get specialist advice from:

- Migrant Help
- Law Centre NI
- Right to Remain