

Housing Myths and Migrants

This leaflet should help people understand the truth behind popular housing myths about migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and foreign nationals.



Housing
Executive

Myth: Migrants are taking all the Housing Executive houses.

Truth: The majority of migrants are living in private rented accommodation as they are able to get accommodation quickly in their area of choice, normally close to the main sources of employment. Also many want to be in furnished accommodation.

Research has shown that 76% of migrant workers resided in privately rented accommodation; only 3% lived in Housing Executive accommodation and 5% in Housing Association accommodation.

One explanation for this myth might be that many of the private rented housing which is rented to newly arrived migrants can be former Housing Executive homes which have been sold off and local people may assume that it is still Housing Executive accommodation.

Myth: The Housing Executive decides where Migrants can live.

Truth: The Housing Selection Scheme has been created to be fair and open and to give applicants a choice in where they wish to live. When the Housing Executive has awarded an applicant points it will place them on the waiting list for their selected areas of choice. Applicants can choose two areas. Some people will seek housing in areas where they know people live who speak the same language or close to particular shops, support networks, schools or employers such as hospitals.

A migrant worker is someone from outside the UK or Ireland here to seek or take up work.

Myth: If someone in your family lives in a Housing Executive property, you will get one too.

Truth: It is not true that you will get allocated a house just because someone else in your family has one. Housing Executive and Housing Association properties are in very short supply and you will be assessed according to your individual/family needs.

Myth: New migrants are jumping the queue for Housing Executive homes.

Truth: Allocation policies do not discriminate on grounds of race or ethnicity. All applicants for social housing complete the same application form. Your needs will be assessed using the published points based Housing Selection Scheme. The Housing Executive will award you points based on your needs and your housing situation. You may be placed on the Common Waiting List to wait to be allocated a property for your selected areas of choice according to the rules of the scheme. People do not get any additional points based on race, Nationality or ethnicity.

Myth: All migrants are entitled to social housing.

Truth: To get accommodation if you are homeless or to go on to the Social Housing Waiting List you must be eligible. The law defines who is and is not eligible, in terms of immigration status and habitual residence. The law is different for people from within the European Economic Area (EEA), the UK and those from elsewhere.

Myth: Homeless people live on the street

Truth: People can be legally classed as homeless if they are sleeping on a friend's sofa, staying in a hostel, they live in an overcrowded home, or live in poor housing conditions.

Myth: Housing Executive accommodation will be available immediately if you're homeless.

Truth: If you are aged 18 or older and you are homeless, the Housing Executive is legally required to provide advice and assistance to help you find a place to live. Whether you will be provided with temporary accommodation or placed on the waiting list for permanent accommodation will depend on your situation and eligibility.

If you are assessed as homeless, eligible for help, in priority need and unintentionally homeless, then the Housing Executive has a duty to find you somewhere to live.

If no permanent accommodation is available you may be provided with temporary accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available. This may be in a hostel or a single property. Some people have been waiting in "Temporary" accommodation for over 5 years.

An immigrant is someone who comes to another country hoping to live permanently.

Myth: Asylum seekers get a free house and move to the front of the queue.

Truth: Asylum seekers do not have access to the mainstream benefit system. They have a parallel system of welfare support providing £36.95 a week per adult or child (a single parent with 2 children or a couple with one child £110.85 per week).

Asylum seekers are not entitled to social housing. No Asylum Seekers are housed in Housing Executive properties.

In 2014/15 a total of 543 Asylum Seekers were accommodated in Northern Ireland in UK Visas & Immigration supported accommodation.

Myth: Asylum Seekers and Refugees are the same.

Truth: An 'asylum seeker' is someone who is seeking asylum. This means they are applying to be given the status of a refugee in another country on the basis that they face persecution in the country they have left under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

A refugee – If an asylum seeker's application for asylum is granted by immigration officials they become a 'refugee' in that country and are given either temporary or permanent leave to remain.

Only those Asylum Seekers who have been officially recognised as Refugees – fewer than 200 in 2012/13 -and those given indefinite leave to remain under immigration law can apply for social housing. They will then be assessed using the same Housing Selection Scheme as all applicants.

Some Statistics

Across Northern Ireland **342 migrant worker households were allocated housing** in the year to 31st July 2014. Main nationalities include Polish (140), Lithuanian (5) and Portuguese (29) households.

1,324 migrant worker households out of 89,000 households were tenants on 31st July 2014. Main nationalities included Polish (416), Lithuanian (240), and Portuguese (162) migrant workers households.

371 migrant workers applying as homeless in one year to 31st July 2014 were awarded full duty applicant (FDA) status. Main nationalities applying as homeless included Polish (111), Lithuanian (68) and Portuguese (49).

At 31st July 2013 there were **508 migrant worker households that had been awarded FDA status** on the waiting list for social housing.

The **social housing waiting list amounts to 41,356 households** at 31 March 2013, of whom around 22,414 are considered to be in housing stress, including 9,878 households deemed to be statutorily homeless.

In the 2011 Census:

The 'white' ethnic group includes 98.2% of the population. The highest percentage of people from a minority ethnic group live in Belfast (3.6%) and Castlereagh (2.9%). The largest minority ethnic group is 'Chinese' making up 0.3% of the population. Main language spoken other than English is Polish (17,731 people or 1% of the total population)

Prior to the 2004 EU expansion the breakdown of 'country of birth' shows 9,703 (0.5%) of the population are people born in EU countries, outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland.

35,704 or 2% of the total residents living in Northern Ireland on Census day 2011 were born in an EU accession country and have moved to Northern Ireland from 2004 on.

Main types of passports held other than UK, Republic of Ireland or No Passport includes EU countries (39,527 or 2.2% of the population), Middle East and Asia (9,189 or 0.5% of the population) and North America and Caribbean (5,989 or 0.3% of the population).

Sources: A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research, DEL, December 2009, Black and Minority Ethnic and Migrant Worker Mapping Update, NI Housing Executive, July 2015.

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Published by the Housing Executive Community Cohesion Unit October 2015.



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