



# REFUGEES AND HOUSING

Challenges and misinformation - a refugee's housing story



Key findings

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# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Wales is at present in the midst of a housing crisis. A Welsh council leader recently compared its magnitude to the aftermath of the Second World War. All local authorities and support services providers are under unprecedented pressure. **The latest Welsh Government figures show that 9,410 individuals across Wales are currently placed in temporary accommodation.** The number of new people entering temporary accommodation each month is exponential to those being rehoused in long-term housing.

Social housing is in short supply. The most recent reliable all-Wales data indicate that over 70,000 were waiting for social housing in 2020. The figure is undoubtedly much higher now.

Private rented alternatives are not much better. Rents have steadily increased over the past two years. The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has been frozen since 2020 and does not cover the cost of rent. Research by the Bevan Foundation found **that only 32 properties advertised in Wales (1.2%) were available at LHA rates in February 2023.** In most cases, the gap between the cheapest monthly rent and LHA rate is over £100, and, in some cases, as much as £400.

Most landlords also add conditions which make their properties even more inaccessible to any low-income group. These include:

- deposits
- several months' rent in advance
- guarantors
- credit checks
- minimum income checks
- professional only requirements

Of the 32 properties in Wales within the LHA, 23 had these requirements. **This leaves only 9 properties (0.34%) at or below the LHA which did not have these stipulations.**



**Only 1.2% of properties on the rental market in Wales in February 2023 were at LHA rates**

# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The UK's annual inflation rate has most recently stood at 10.4%. The cost of living crisis has also seen an unprecedented rise in bills. Bevan Foundation research has also found that 13% of the Welsh population are in arrears on at least one bill. The same research found that 14% of Welsh households either sometimes, often, or always do not have enough for all the basics. Further, 40% are going without heating in their homes. To overcome this situation, **28% of people in Wales had to borrow money to pay for bills between October 2022 and January 2023.**

As a low-income group, refugees in Wales are greatly affected by all the above. They face additional barriers, too. **Once the Home Office grants them Leave to Remain, they are only given a 28-day eviction notice to vacate their Home Office provided property.** That is 28 days to open bank accounts, apply for benefits, find employment, and secure accommodation.

**Refugees have only 28 days to open bank accounts, apply for benefits, find employment, and secure accommodation**

The short period after refugees have been granted Leave to Remain from the Home Office is when our Move-On service has the most contact with them. **Welsh Refugee Council case workers (in our four offices) dealt with 1,152 contact episodes regarding housing between April 2022 and 31 December 2022.** Only Universal Credit had more contact episodes during this period.

The five most common housing concerns raised were:

1. The chaos surrounding the move from temporary to permanent accommodation
2. The lack of clear communication from local authorities regarding housing
3. The 28-day eviction notice from Home Office accommodation
4. Families with infants being kept in temporary accommodation hotels rather than supported accommodation
5. The Local Housing Allowance being too low to cover private renting

# CHALLENGING MYTHS THE HOUSING FORUMS

Many newly granted refugees are actually unaware of their housing rights. Neither are they always aware of their obligations. Myths and misinformation perpetrated through community groups create very high expectations. This mixture leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Fear of being evicted or other potential negative consequences to their legal status mean refugees will not speak out.

Some of the most prevailing myths are:

**#Myth 1:** People believe that a local authority will support them regardless of where they are.

Refugees will move across Wales and the UK more broadly. Sometimes this is because family members, friends, or members of their community have offered them accommodation or said they have been given a council house there. However, a local authority only has a duty to provide support if there is a local connection. As a result, many are left in limbo without any support available and are forced to return to their original local authority having taken a financial hit.

**#Myth 2:** People believe that they will be given social housing just by going to a local authority's housing services. They are unaware of the long waiting lists, priority need, or local connection. These requirements exist because of the scarcity of social housing. Refugees want social housing because it is cheaper and offers security of tenure. But current conditions mean most refugees are not eligible for it. Despite this, many are willing to wait to be given social housing.

**#Myth 3:** People believe they can refuse a local authority's offer of accommodation. Due to social housing shortage, local authorities will offer affordable options in the private rented sector to those without priority need. Refugees who have their mind set on social housing may well reject this offer. They fail to understand that by doing so, the local authority's duty to support them ends. Not only that, but they will also be asked to leave their temporary accommodation. Homelessness is the consequence.

# CHALLENGING MYTHS THE HOUSING FORUMS

To challenge these misconceptions, we have organised Housing Forums. These Housing Forums have focused on:

- highlighting housing and homelessness support available
- dispelling myths around housing
- managing expectations
- portraying the challenges in accessing social housing
- explaining the rights in the private rented sector
- creating incentives to access the private rented sector
- sharing accurate up to date information

The Housing Policy and Research Lead and the Housing and Landlord Caseworker have led the housing forums. An Arabic-speaking caseworker has also attended three of the sessions to provide support. Five housing forums have been conducted in Cardiff since October 2022. These have been held at the YMCA, a hostel, and OASIS, an activity and community hub.

Date	Location	Attendees
Nov 2022	YMCA	15
Nov 2022	Oasis	11
Jan 2023	YMCA	13
Feb 2023	Oasis	6
April 2023	YMCA	10

Around 80% of attendees tend to be single refugee adult males. Most are currently housed in hostels, such as the YMCA, as temporary housing. The majority are unemployed and struggle with English. The most common spoken languages are Arabic, Farsi, and Kurdish Sorani. Materials are provided in those languages. Asylum seekers, single female refugees, and refugee couples have also attended these forums.

# CHALLENGING MYTHS THE HOUSING FORUMS

The housing forums are an opportunity to engage and do outreach work with refugees who may otherwise slip under the radar. Attendees often come holding erroneous views. For instance, at our most recent forum, whilst almost all attendees knew what social housing was, half believed that everyone was entitled to one unconditionally.

Even if not contributing directly, refugees will eagerly listen to the information provided and spread it by taking material to share with friends and community members. Overall, attendees appreciate the information and see it as a valuable insight. At one even, one attendee stood up to say:

**“THANK YOU FOR SHARING THIS INFORMATION WITH ME. I CAN NOW GO OUT TO TRY AND FIND SOMETHING FOR MYSELF. NOBODY HAS TAKEN THE TIME TO EXPLAIN THINGS TO ME BEFORE, SO I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT OR WHERE TO GO. NOW I DO. IT ALL MAKES SENSE TO ME NOW. THANKS!”**

The Housing and Landlord Caseworker has noted a decrease in people's expectations of social housing. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the housing forum. With time, other myths will also be challenged, and refugees will feel empowered to face the housing market.

 



## HOUSING FORUM

DO YOU HAVE ANY HOUSING ISSUES?

DO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR HOUSING OPTIONS?

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR HOUSING RIGHTS ARE?

**JOIN US!**

THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2023  
14:00-15:30  
OASIS CARDIFF



# KEY RECCOMENDATIONS

Although the housing forums are a useful tool in signposting and empowering people to find accommodation, they will in no way solve the current housing crisis. There are a number of recommendations to stakeholders which would drastically improve the housing situation for thousands of refugees.

## UK GOVERNMENT

- End all 'hostile environment' policies towards immigrants. The impact of these policies is detrimental to the mental health of refugees and affects their long-term prospects.
- Create collaborative pathways with the Welsh Government and Welsh local authorities to avoid evictions into homelessness from Home Office accommodation.
- Increase engagement work with asylum seekers before they are granted Leave To Remain so they are aware of their housing rights. People often leave the asylum system completely unaware of what to look for or where during their move on process.
- Increase the 28-day eviction period from Home Office accommodation.
- Grant asylum seekers the right to work 6 months after their arrival so that they can build up the financial resources to access the private rented sector.
- Increase the Local Housing Allowance, at least in line with inflation.



# KEY RECCOMENDATIONS

### WELSH GOVERNMENT

- Introduce into law the Right To Adequate Housing.
- Bring more properties into the social market. The existing target for 20,000 new social homes before the end of the Senedd term in 2025 is destined to fall short compared to the numbers in temporary accommodation and those on social housing waiting lists.
- Extend the Leasing Scheme Wales to all local authorities and increase the number of leased properties to local authorities.
- Introduce legislation to eliminate conditions which act as barriers to accessing the private rented sector to low-income groups, such as deposits, several months' rent in advance, guarantors, credit checks, minimum income checks, or professional only requirements.

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- Deliver optional 28-day bridging accommodation to refugees evicted from Home Office accommodation in Wales. Local authorities have a duty to provide those threatened with homelessness support within 56 days. This 28 days would extend the total period in line with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

