

When people seeking asylum receive their refugee status, and leave to remain in the UK, it should be a time of great relief and rejoicing. However, as newly-recognised refugees are evicted from their 'NASS' accommodation (where they have been housed whilst their asylum claim has been processed), this creates a new pressure point for individuals as they now need to find alternative accommodation. Refugees are also entitled to claim benefits as the asylum-related payments stop, so there is a lot of pressure to open a bank account, apply for benefits and provide all the paperwork necessary - whilst also having to wait for their first payment. In recent months, the Home Office have reduced the eviction notice period from 28 days to 7 days, causing many newly-recognised refugees to face homelessness at this point.

Many churches are asking how they can help support newly-recognised refugees at this crucial moment, particularly for those they have got to know and who have become part of their community. Many are asking if they should be providing lodgings for newly-recognised refugees, in the spare rooms of church members' homes. Having clear expectations for the home-owner and for the lodger is really important to minimise the potential for misunderstanding later on. Here are some things to think through and consider as your church considers this:

Length of stay – Home-owners will want to think through how long they are offering for lodgers to stay with them. Even if the home-owner is happy to have the lodger for a long time, having a point at which the contract can be reviewed can be helpful to assess how the relationship is working out. It is worth considering how the lodger will be able to find longer term accommodation and if you are able to offer any support in this way. There are huge pressures on social housing, and providing accommodation for someone may make them less of a priority to be allocated social housing locally. It is worth contacting your Local Authority to discuss this and making sure that any potential lodgers are aware of this. Often, the home-owner needs to issue an eviction notice to the lodger, in order for a claim for social housing to move forward.

Living cross culturally – Inviting someone from a different culture to live in your home is a hugely enriching experience, as you learn about each other's cultures and values. It is worth remembering though that there are likely to be moments where the two cultures have different expectations, or ways of doing things. For example, many people from other cultures think that the British wash the dishes in an unhygienic way! Some obvious areas where cultures may collide include: cooking, washing, bathing and cleaning the house but there are likely to be others that take you by surprise too.

Cooking and cleaning - Will the home-owner expect the lodger to eat with them as a household, or to cook separately? Do you have acceptable times for cooking in the kitchen? Having space in the kitchen cupboards for the lodger to use can help them to be independent. Will the home-owner expect the lodger to help with cleaning in the home too? It is good to discuss these things together beforehand.

House Insurance – The home-owner may need to let their insurance provider know that they have a lodger.

Rent – Now that the lodger has received refugee status, they are entitled to receive local housing allowance and so should be able to afford to pay some rent. Welcome Homes recommends that this is set at the local housing allowance (LHA) rate, in order to be affordable for the lodger. You can find out how much the LHA rate is in your area [here](#). You will need to draw up a formal rental agreement in order to charge rent and you may need to check what the individual (or couple) is entitled to with the Local Authority. By making this as similar to a tenancy as possible, including paying rent at the start of the month, will help the lodger to learn about tenancies in the UK for the long term.

Paying rent can be empowering to the lodger, as they seek to rebuild their lives in the UK and take responsibility for themselves. The UK government's [Rent a Room scheme](#) allows you to earn up to £7500 in rent tax free from renting out a spare room. Even if the home-owner doesn't need the income, you may consider donating it through our [Property Associates scheme](#) to help more refugees be welcomed across the UK.

Bills - It is important for the lodger to understand the added costs involved in the household bills. Consider how they can contribute to the different bills as part of the household and help them to be aware of these different costs.

Deposits - taking a deposit and placing it in a Deposit Protection Scheme is also something that will help the lodger to learn about renting in the UK. You may want to take just a small deposit, or help the lodger to pay regularly to a deposit up. As they are likely to receive this back at the end of the stay, this will also help them to build up a deposit for future tenancies.

Safeguarding – Our churches are now very mindful of how we keep everyone safe in the different activities we are involved in. It is worth considering whether the lodgings will come under the safeguarding policies of the church, as a formal activity, or if it will be an arrangement between the individual home-owner and lodgings involved. Whilst British home-owners are likely to be able to get DBS checks carried out, these are more difficult for people from a refugee-background. NACCOM recommends asking people to self disclose any safeguarding concerns there may be beforehand and, if you are setting up a formal lodging project, to contact your local police to see if you can set up a secure process to identify any risks. You may also consider taking risk assessments of lodgers and home owners to reduce any potential risks to safety.

Pets - Many cultures are not as used to having pets in the home as is the norm in Britain! Make sure that lodgers are aware of any household pets, particularly dogs and cats, beforehand as they may not feel comfortable in a home that does.

Giving independence – Lodgers are likely to want and need to take responsibility for their own lives, even when living with other people. It is important for the home-owner to consider how they are giving the lodger their own space within the home, and not putting unreasonable demands on them as you live together.

Support network – Churches are ready-made communities where people from refugee-backgrounds should be able to find community in a variety of ways. It is important that the wider church community considers how they can support the home-owners and lodgers, by providing friendships which can take the pressure off the individual relationship within the home.

Contract - A written contract can help to outline the expectations that are decided on, for everyone involved. It may also be worth considering getting a contract translated into the lodgers first language, to ensure that they fully understand it.

Fairness – It may be that your church has had a number of people seeking asylum and from a refugee-background engage with your community. As one or two are offered places to live, bear in mind that this might be seen as unfair by others in need of a home within your community.

Providing accommodation for people from a refugee-background is great fun, and should be a huge blessing for all involved. We hope that these things help you to consider the different aspects involved in refugee lodgings, to ensure the best experience for everyone.

Other resources

[NACCOM](#) also have some fantastic practical resources which will help you as well. If your church is setting up a formal project for refugee lodgings, we also recommend becoming members of NACCOM to receive their support and expertise.

The Chartered Institute for Housing have also written a briefing about the 7-day evictions [here](#).

SpareRoom.com have a helpful guide on taking in lodgers which you can sign up to access [here](#).