



## What is the evidence about migrant living conditions in the private rented sector and how could they be improved?

At least three-quarters of recent migrants to the UK live in the private rented sector. They often have low awareness of their rights and responsibilities as tenants, and are more likely to have irregular tenancies or to live in poor-condition multi-occupation properties.

Such conditions can cause tensions and poor relations between migrants and settled residents in cities and rural areas. Too few councils recognise this as an issue in their housing or integration strategies, or use existing powers to address the issues.

### Migrants' use of the private rented sector

Migrants who have lived in the UK for a long time have similar housing tenure patterns to the settled population, but recent migrants (here for up to five years) overwhelmingly use the private rented sector. This is partly because home-ownership and social housing are not readily available to them, and partly because of its flexibility and relative affordability.

Newly arrived migrants often access accommodation through friends, or through employers and agents who find them work. They don't use mainstream advice agencies or high street letting agencies. So lettings are often informal, possibly without legal agreements, and some involve unconventional arrangements such as illegally converted outbuildings or obliging people to share with strangers.

Tenants may be too intimidated to pursue any complaints (e.g. if they face losing their job), unaware of their rights or of agencies that could help them, or unable to wait for resolution. Some migrants may view standards, management and overcrowding as less critical factors within wider choices they make about work, incomes and spending on accommodation.

Migrant workers who decide to bring families to the UK, or asylum seekers who receive approved status as refugees, often want more secure, longer-term accommodation. They may be eligible for social housing but unaware of this or unable to wait. So they often move through a succession of less suitable private tenancies and are at particular risk of homelessness.

### A sector under pressure

Migrants are often concentrated in poorer-quality and cheaper dwellings. This part of the sector is under particular pressure. Greater barriers to home-ownership mean more households using private lettings. Government policy encourages councils to discharge their homelessness duties through private lettings. Changes in the local housing allowance system are making it harder for tenants to afford rents, increasing competition at the bottom end.

## Neighbourhood tensions

Where migrants' use of the sector is concentrated, the impact on others can be greater. Properties acquired by landlords and converted for the migrant market are unavailable to others, like first-time buyers. Multi-occupation may increase. Competition and the environmental problems associated with heavy use of multi-occupied (and often poorly managed) properties can lead to tensions and poor relations between migrants and settled residents.

## Recognition required

Demand from migrants will fluctuate as migration fluctuates, but the migrant sub-sector will continue to be an important part of the market. It needs to be considered in housing and integration strategy and planning locally and nationally. Local responses must be practical, targeted and affordable. Working with others, including local migrant and other neighbourhood groups, is critical.

## Taking action

The Housing and Migration Network's review of current practice suggests several practical steps that can be taken at a local and a national level. At the local level this includes:

- Schemes to encourage access to better-quality lettings - e.g. deposit schemes, housing options services and accreditation or local lettings schemes.
- Improving migrants' access to housing and wider advice services - e.g. by having staff with appropriate language skills, liaising with migrant groups or with employers, publicising services in locations used by migrants.
- Involving social landlords - to offer management and/or maintenance services to private landlords, to target some provision at migrants, especially refugees.
- Developing local partnerships within the sector - e.g. support agencies and migrant community groups linking with reputable lettings agents and private landlords and possibly even managing properties.
- Involving migrant groups in imaginative options - e.g. renovating empty homes.

- Ensuring local authority environmental health officers are more aware of migrants, and migrants of environmental health services.
- More co-ordination at regional and local levels - sharing expertise and resources.

## National support

There are also practical steps that could be taken at a national level, including:

- Better co-ordination by national-level bodies - policy affecting migrants and private renting is split between government departments, while agencies such as the UK Border Agency and Gangmasters Licensing Authority also have important roles.
- Support for good Landlord and tenant relations - a simplified, standard tenancy agreement; a tenant referencing scheme as part of the 'pay back' to the landlord; nationally agreed standards of accreditation.

*UK migrants and the private rented sector; a policy and practice report from the Housing and Migration Network and other network publications are available as free downloads at [www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/housing-and-migration](http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/housing-and-migration)*

### About the speakers:

**Neil Coles** is Chair of the National HMO Network and Housing Services Manager, Maidstone Borough Council. **Gill Green** is a freelance researcher. As a senior research manager at the Audit Commission she managed *Crossing Borders*, a report on responding to the local challenges of migrant workers. Both were members of the Network.

The Network was jointly established by HACT and its funders, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Metropolitan Migration Foundation. It explored practical solutions to the reality of continuing migration, and the associated pressures on housing and neighbourhood cohesion.



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