



The impact of asylum and possible amnesty on social housing

Summary

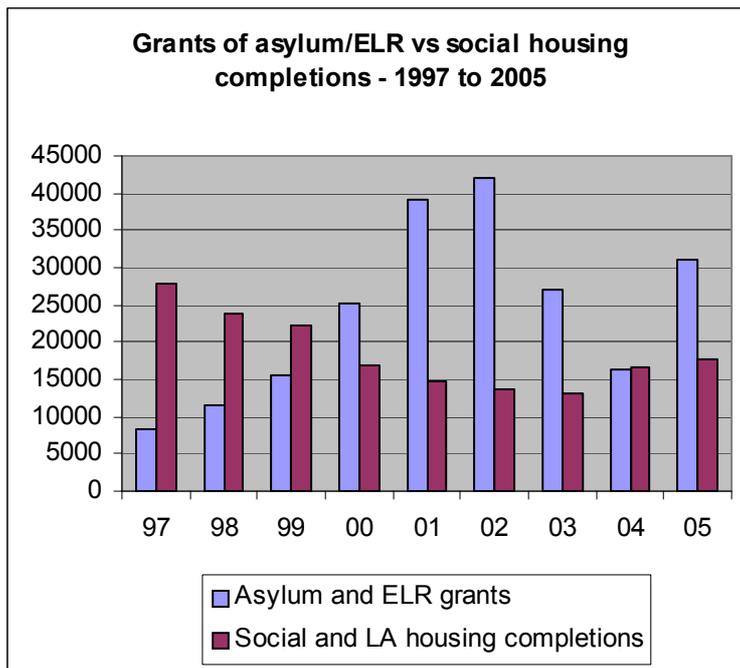
1. The unprecedented number of asylum-seekers granted permission to stay in the UK in recent years has exceeded the number of new social houses built in the period by nearly 50,000 and has had a major impact on the availability of social housing for the native population. This is not to imply that those in genuine fear of persecution should not be given refuge; it is to suggest that the government should have taken account of the very large numbers involved in making provision for new social housing.
2. The problems would be exacerbated massively if the government were to give a further amnesty to unauthorised (illegal) immigrants as is, apparently, being considered by the Minister for Immigration. At the present rate of building it would take 20 – 30 years to provide social housing for those granted an amnesty even if no further housing was allocated to those now on the waiting lists. That would certainly be damaging to social cohesion.

Social Housing

3. Asylum applicants who are granted asylum or who are granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR)¹ in the United Kingdom become eligible for social housing. Eligibility does not, of course, mean that those granted asylum or ELR will automatically be granted social housing (nor are they the only immigrants to qualify for social housing) but it is likely that the circumstances of people given such status, particularly those with families, will warrant their being placed high on the priority list.
4. The early years of this century saw a rapid rise in the number of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom and a corresponding increase in the number being granted asylum or exceptional leave to remain in the UK. This coincided with a very low rate of building new social housing. The following bar chart shows the grants of asylum and ELR against the completion of new social and local authority housing since 1997².

¹ Now called discretionary leave or humanitarian protection.

² ODPM: Housebuilding Starts and Completions GB up to 2000 and Housebuilding Starts and Completions England Table 1a) – figures are number of completions of social and local authority housing.



5. The figures for asylum and ELR for 2005 include the family indefinite leave to remain exercise. This was announced by the Home Secretary in October 2003. It allows certain asylum-seeker families who have been in the UK for four or more years to stay without further consideration of their cases. As at the end of 2005, about 20,000 principal applicants (and 50,000 dependants) had been granted indefinite leave. We have included all of these principal applicants in the 2005 figures although, in practice, some would have been granted leave in 2004. This group of people are likely to have placed a particular strain on social housing as they all have families with them in the UK. A further 11,930 cases remain to be decided.

6. Over the nine years 1997 -2005, the number of grants of asylum and ELR totalled over 216,000 compared to 167,000 additional social and local authority homes built in this period.

7. We conclude that the government have, in granting asylum or ELR on such a scale, placed a very considerable strain on social housing over the last decade which they have failed to redress in their construction of social housing.

The impact of an amnesty

8. The scale of the problems surrounding social housing would be massively exacerbated if the government were to give an amnesty to illegal immigrants. The Immigration Minister, Liam Byrne, did not rule out an amnesty when he gave evidence to the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons on 13th June 2006. (transcript at footnote³).

9. In 2005 the Home Office published a report⁴ which estimated the number of unauthorised (illegal) immigrants at between 310,000 and 570,000 with a central estimate of 430,000. The estimate was produced by comparing the 2001 census with immigration records and it therefore represented the unauthorised (illegal) population as at 2001.

10. In July 2005, Migration Watch updated this estimate to take account of failed asylum seekers in subsequent years and the UK born children of illegal immigrants. We estimated that the population of unauthorised migrants as at 2005 was in the range 515,000 to 870,000 with a central estimate of 670,000⁵.

11. That estimate is still likely to be broadly correct. Since that time the status of some of those included in the illegal immigrant population in 2005 has been regularised – firstly, the amnesty for certain categories of failed asylum seeker (para 5 above) covered about 70,000, including dependants, with 12,000 further cases to be decided. Secondly, the accession to the EU of the ten East and South European countries in May 2004 rendered the presence of their nationals legal. However, the number of people in this category is likely to have been modest as the government had successfully deported many failed asylum applicants from the Accession countries prior to May 2005. The government have since reported that up to 58,000 Accession country nationals who registered under the Workers Registration Scheme in May 2004 may have been in the country beforehand.⁶ However, many of these are likely to have entered the UK after the 2001 census and so would not require an adjustment to the 2001 estimate of the illegal population. On the other hand levels of immigration,

³ Uncorrected transcript of oral evidence to the Home Affairs Committee on 13 June 2006:

Q1228 Mr Benyon: Minister, you will know that you are as much judged by what you do not say as what you do. You specifically did not exclude the possibility of an amnesty for illegal immigrants in this country. Is it something that you have discussed in your 11 days? Is it something that you have considered?

Mr Byrne: I just want to be straight with the Committee and say it is just too early to tell. Unfortunately, I am one of those people who has to have that analysis in front of them before getting into the sorts of options that might be considered in the future. I do not want to mislead the Committee or point in directions which are going to be fruitless for the Committee's deliberations over the work that it has to do finalising the report.

⁴ Home Office On line report 29/05 – Sizing the unauthorised (illegal) migrant population in the United Kingdom in 2001.

⁵ Migration Watch briefing paper 9.15

⁶ Home Office Accession Monitoring Report May 2004 to March 2005 published on 26 May 2005

from outside the EU, into the UK have been running at record levels in recent years.⁷ It is likely, therefore, that there will be significant numbers overstaying their visa permissions, as well as continued unauthorised entry to the UK. We conclude that these factors tend to cancel each other out and that our central estimate of July 2005 of 670,000 is likely to remain broadly correct.

12. When illegal immigrants are granted an amnesty in the form of indefinite leave to remain (settle) in the UK they become immediately eligible for social housing. They will also become entitled to bring their families (or their future spouses) into the UK under family reunification provisions.

13. Again there is a distinction to be drawn between those eligible for social housing and those granted it as claims will be prioritised on the basis of housing needs. However, the illegal migrant population, particularly those who have families in the UK or who bring their families from overseas, will include many who will be considered to be a high priority.

14. With an estimated illegal immigrant population of over half a million and with social housing being built at the rate of between 15,000 and 20,000 homes each year, the impact of an amnesty on social housing provision would clearly be immense. At the present rate of building, it would take 20-30 years to provide those granted amnesty with social housing, even if no further housing was made available to those now on the housing lists. This would clearly be socially divisive and would add to the problems of community cohesion.

15. Accordingly, an amnesty for illegal immigrants should be firmly rejected both for this reason and because it would encourage further illegal immigration, as has proved to be the case in both Italy and Spain.

1 July 2006

⁷ Net immigration of non-EU citizens tripled from 88,000 in 1997 to 271,000 in 2004 – Source ONS : International Migration Series MN31