

Britain: Government plans forcible removal of 60,000 asylum seekers

Robert Stevens
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The Labour government is planning to introduce new measures designed to forcibly remove up to 60,000 asylum seekers from the country over the next two years.

According to a report published in the *Guardian* newspaper August 13, the Home Office is introducing a new set of guidelines that will drastically speed up deportations. Some 8,000 asylum applicants have already been removed in the last year.

Entitled “Unrest fear over asylum crackdown”, the report reveals that measures under consideration include giving the Immigration and Nationality Department new powers to search and arrest asylum seekers without police support.

Other proposals include:

- * The creation of three new immigration arrest teams, to be operational by the autumn. The London-based squads will be tasked to hunt down those whose application for asylum has been rejected. To speed up the process, the squads will also have access to 150 new mobile fingerprint scanners.

- * New temporary detention centres to be set up to house those apprehended by the immigration arrest teams.

The Home Office has already spent an additional £2 billion, and doubled staff numbers, as part of its efforts to facilitate the removal of asylum seekers. The immigration appellate authority has been expanded from 35 courtrooms to 103, resulting in a tripling of the number of days judges spend hearing appeals against asylum decisions. The number of presenting officers available to the Home Office to make appeals on its behalf has also been more than doubled recently.

Presently some 750 asylum seekers a month are being deported, and the government expects this figure to rise to 2,500 a month as a result of its intensified

deportation programme. Due to the draconian asylum legislation in Britain approximately 80 percent of asylum cases fail after a first appeal against initial rejection of a claim.

The *Guardian* article quoted an unnamed government minister, stating that the new proposals were “big stuff and we are going to have to handle it very carefully. There are a lot of people who have been here a while, think they have been forgotten about, and because of our inefficiency in the past, plan to put roots down.”

The Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) has warned that the proposed measures could result in civil unrest. In a statement Acpo stressed to the government, “the scale of what is being planned...will require police involvement”.

Acpo has drawn up a manual dealing with the planned removal of failed asylum claimants. This states in part that “The removal of refused asylum seekers is a politically sensitive issue which achieves a higher profile as determination of claims increases, and where the national asylum assistant service looks to evict failed asylum seekers from their accommodation, it is likely that the police will be involved in preventing breaches of the peace”.

Drafted by Kent’s deputy chief constable Bob Ayling, the manual says that the likely increased police involvement in deportations could have a detrimental impact on their day-to-day role in the local community and contains the potential for public disorder.

The government’s proposals came just days after Firsat Yildiz, a 22 year-old Kurdish asylum seeker was stabbed to death on Sighthill housing estate in Glasgow, Scotland on August 5. The same week, a 22-year-old Kurdish asylum seeker in Hull, Humberside was stabbed in the neck by a gang of white youths. Two days later, a 22-year-old Iranian asylum

seeker was stabbed in the back outside his flat on the Sighthill estate.

The racist assaults caused the government to announce it would review its “dispersal” policy. Introduced 18 months ago, the dispersal scheme moved some 30,000 asylum seekers away from London and the southeast to a number of northern cities. A further 25,000 applicants are currently waiting to be moved into the designated cities in the north of England and Scotland.

The asylum seekers’ dispersal policy review will report back to Home Secretary David Blunkett in October. But Blunkett has already stated that the government does not intend to abolish the dispersal programme.

A Home Office spokesperson said that the “The Home Secretary has been concerned since taking office by some aspects of the way in which dispersal has been working on the ground and wants a rapid operational review to examine concerns that have been raised”.

The dispersal policy has provided a boon to slum landlords, as a number of dubious private firms are among those contracted to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. In some instances the accommodation provided had already been condemned as unfit for human habitation.

Although current legislation prohibits asylum seekers from taking on paid employment, one proposal that has been floated is for a scheme forcing refugees to carry out voluntary work while they await the result of their asylum case. The *Observer* August 12 reported that “Blunkett is keen that they [asylum seekers] be seen to give something back to society with more ‘purposeful activity’, such as helping clean up rundown estates”.

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On August 8, 32 asylum seekers from Kosovo, Sudan, Kashmir and Afghanistan who have been held in Cardiff jail for four months began a hunger strike in protest at their imprisonment. Earlier this year, the Home Office introduced the policy of “pre-deportation penal housing”—the use of jails to hold asylum seekers—pending the building of yet more special detention centres. After visiting the jail in July, Cardiff North MP Julie Morgan told the House of the Commons that the policy of locking up those awaiting deportation was “deeply inhumane and inappropriate.” The 32 refugees alleged they were deceived by

immigration officials and were not told that they were going to be locked-up, merely that they were “going to Cardiff”.

See Also:

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