

UK Starmer government deports more asylum seekers and migrant workers

Harvey Thompson**18 August 2025**

The UK Labour government has carried out a huge nationwide operation in recent weeks to arrest and deport “illegal” asylum seekers and migrant workers.

The Home Office announced last week that 1,780 people were stopped and interrogated over suspected “illegal working activity” between July 20 and 27. Described as a “nationwide intensification week,” it targeted workplaces in the hugely exploitative gig economy, with a focus on food delivery drivers.

Around 280 were arrested in areas including Hillingdon in north-west London, Dumfries in Scotland, and Birmingham.

Following the crackdown 89 people were detained pending deportation. Another 53 are having their asylum support reviewed, which the Home Office said could result in support being suspended or withdrawn.

Under UK law, asylum seekers are effectively barred from employment while their asylum claim is being processed. Permission can be applied following a year of waiting.

Boasting of the operation, the Home Office announced that “Immigration Enforcement teams will receive a £5 million funding boost to ramp up illegal working intensification activity even further.

The “cash injection” would come from a £100 million investment for border security announced earlier this month. It would “contribute to a major surge in enforcement visits over the coming months” at “illegal working hotspots more frequently and increase enforcement teams’ intelligence gathering capabilities to support frontline enforcement activity.”

Sky News reporters joined police on some of the operations targeting delivery drivers. It reported that “Deliveroo, Uber Eats and Just Eat have said they will ramp up facial verification and fraud checks over the coming months to prevent people working as riders without permission.”

Around 50 smaller businesses including car washes and restaurants were issued with penalty notices that could see them handed substantial fines if they are found to have hired workers without the legal right to work in the UK.

In another direct dog whistle to the far-right constituency being mobilised by Reform UK and the fascist gangs who have mobilised throughout the summer outside hotels accommodating asylum seekers, the government announced it will share information about asylum hotel locations with food delivery firms in a purported effort to disrupt illegal work “hotspots”.

Heading up the campaign to vilify asylum seekers is Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who issued an X posting last week further conflating seeking asylum and immigration with crime:

“If you come to this country illegally, you will face detention and return. If you come to this country and commit a crime, we will deport you as soon as possible.”

Starmer claimed that foreign “criminals” had been exploiting Britain’s immigration system for far too long, that they have stayed in the UK for months or even years while their appeals continue to be processed. The fact is that the length of time for processing is the sole responsibility of this and previous governments.

On August 7, the government detained the first “small boat migrants” under the “one in, one out” returns treaty announced by Starmer in a joint press conference with the French president Emmanuel Macron last month. Under its terms for each small boat migrant sent back across the English Channel, an asylum seeker deemed to have a valid claim will be allowed to enter the UK from France under a “legal route”.

An unspecified number of migrants who arrived in the UK by small boat are being held in an immigration removal centre pending their removal to France, believed to be within weeks.

On the day, Starmer said: “No gimmicks, just results. If you break the law to enter this country, you will face being sent back. When I say I will stop at nothing to secure our borders, I mean it.”

In language supposedly aimed at the people smugglers rather than asylum seekers and replacing the previous Conservative governments’ mantra of “Stop the Boats” with

“Smash the Gangs”, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper claimed that “criminal gangs” spent up to seven years embedding themselves along the UK border.

Conservative Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp taunted the government with, “Labour are now boasting about arrests, but we know they are too scared to actually deport anyone.”

Anxious to prove otherwise, with a frothing xenophobic media demanding deportations, on August 7 the Home Office posted a video showing asylum seekers being herded into a holding facility and a message on X:

This was followed up August 11, with a Home Office video showing asylum seekers being frogmarched on to a plane accompanied by sinister music with the following message:

“For too long, foreign criminals have remained in the UK and exploited our system while their cases are processed.

“We are increasing the number of foreign criminals who can have their legal appeals heard from abroad - making more returns flights like this possible sooner.

The government has also expanded its “deport now, appeal later” scheme to 23 countries, claiming this “would increase the country’s ability to remove foreign criminals immediately and ease the burden on detention centres and prisons. It will also save taxpayer money.”

Under draconian legislation enacted by the government in June and expected to come into force in September, prisoners will face deportation 30 percent into their prison sentence rather than the current 50 percent. The government will need parliament to greenlight its proposal to bring this down to 0 percent; which they will almost certainly get.

Commenting on the law change, Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood said, “Our message is clear... If you abuse our hospitality and break our laws, we will send you packing.

“Deportations are up under this government, and with this new law they will happen earlier than ever before.”

In its first five months in office, the Starmer Labour government set a new record on deportations. But the noxious anti-immigration atmosphere—with the government playing a major role—means that whatever repression is meted out is never enough to satiate the most vicious anti-immigration forces.

Last week, figures showed that the number of migrants arriving in the UK this year after crossing the English Channel topped 25,000—the earliest point in a calendar year at which the 25,000 mark has been passed since data on Channel crossings was first compiled in 2018 under the Conservatives. On August 12, the Home Office published official statistics showing that more than 50,000 people have crossed the Channel in small boats since Starmer became prime minister. Every right-wing newspaper and media

outlet pounced on the figures to denounce the government for its inaction. The nominally liberal and pro-Labour *Guardian* pointed out that “Rishi Sunak, the last Conservative prime minister, took 603 days in office to pass the 50,000 milestone, while it took Boris Johnson 1,066 days during the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Predictably the figures prompted responses as to which party was genuinely the most anti-immigrant.

Labour former home secretary Jacqui Smith (now Baroness Smith of Malvern) told the BBC that reaching the milestone is “unacceptable”. Speaking to Times Radio she said while the government “have taken a lot of important action already” such numbers were arriving “because it hasn’t been tackled by the last government over recent years.”

Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch utilised the occasion to address anti-migrant protesters in a public house in Epping in Essex—where the local Bell Hotel has been under siege for weeks by the far-right. She declared “just having people who can stay in a hotel, go out and come as they please, whether or not they’re criminals, we have no idea who these people are—I don’t think that that’s right and it’s gone on long enough.” Badenoch suggested detention camps along the lines of “Nightingale pop-up hospitals” set up in the early months of the COVID pandemic be built to hold asylum seekers. She asked, “Is it possible for us to set up camps and police that, rather than bringing all of this hassle into communities?”

She invited the far-right organisers of anti-migrant protests to advise the party declaring, “As a party, we need to also hear from the community about what you think the solutions are. We don’t have all the answers; it’s important that we make sure that the community is part of the problem solved.”

On Sunday, Tory Justice Secretary Robert Jenrick, likely the next party leader, attended a far-right mobilisation outside the Bell Hotel. He told the *Telegraph*, “This problem has been going on for six years —170,000 people, mostly undocumented young men, have broken into our country. Each one of them is going to cost us half a million pounds if they stay.”

Declaring solidarity with the fascists, Jenrick declared, “This has to come to an end, and I wanted to come here today to show my support for the fair-minded patriotic people here who are out protesting every weekend.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact