

UK Labour government announces two former military sites will become asylum seeker detention camps

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Asylum seekers in Britain are to be housed within weeks at two former military sites in Inverness, Scotland and East Sussex in England, as the Starmer government enforces a policy to remove them from hotels.

There are no humane facilities to house people arriving in the UK seeking asylum, meaning successive governments have housed them in hotels. From a peak of over 56,000 asylum seekers in hotels at the end of September 2023, there are still 32,000 living in them. This situation has been utilised by far-right to wage a xenophobic campaign aimed at deporting asylum seekers, culminating this summer in a series of often violent demonstrations outside hotels.

Seeking to appeal to the far-right constituency of Reform UK, which has a significant poll lead, the government has ramped up its own anti-immigrant offensive. Last week, *The Times* reported that the government was to move hundreds of asylum seekers out of hotels and into the Cameron Barracks in Inverness and the Crowborough army training camp in East Sussex. Up to 900 people will be held in the barracks. In a dog whistle to the far-right, the Home Office stated, “We are furious at the level of illegal migrants and asylum hotels,” and claimed that the move will “ease pressure on communities”.

Defence Secretary John Healey first confirmed in September that ministers were looking at using military sites as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers who have arrived in Britain via small boats crossing the English Channel. In opposition Labour had pledged to end the use of former military sites to accommodate asylum seekers. Under the Tories, Napier Barracks, near Folkestone, and a former Royal Air Force base—Wethersfield in Essex—were used as asylum seeker accommodation. Labour is not only retaining both for

asylum seeker use, but is adding the facilities in Inverness and East Sussex.

The Starmer government is planning to house up to 10,000 migrants in hovel-like conditions in detention centres created from the former military bases. This is the fate that awaits many fleeing from poverty and societal collapse in countries in the Middle East and Africa devastated by wars backed by British imperialism.

In laying siege to hotels, the far-right and its echo chamber media claim day in day out that asylum seekers are living a life of luxury at tax payers’ expense. This is a pack of lies.

Under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the Home Office has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for asylum seekers who appear to be destitute. But the government support they receive is the absolute minimum. Asylum seekers are provided financial “support” of about £7.02 per person per day and from this must *cover all basic needs like food, clothing, and transport*. They do not have any choice in the accommodation they are assigned, or its location.

This can be in multiple occupancy house, a hotel, where they often must share a room, or barracks. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while waiting for their claim to be processed, which can take months.

The lying claim that asylum hotels are luxurious was repeated by Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s spokesperson saying, “Military sites can provide proper security, health and wellbeing standards, and that is what we’re intent on delivering, *instead of luxury sites, as we’ve seen over recent years.*”

But the *Times* reported, “Downing Street suggested that moving asylum seekers into military barracks would be worth it even if costs were higher because it would help to quell public discontent over illegal immigration.”

Moreover, “the shift in accommodation types could act as a deterrent for migrants thinking of making illegal journeys to the UK.”

Within hours of the *Times* revealing, on October 28, the planned use of the Inverness and East Sussex sites, it published another article revealing that “extensive refurbishment works need to be carried out at Cameron Barracks in Inverness, where the government intends to accommodate about 300 asylum seekers. Headlined “‘Unsafe’ barracks could delay migrants’ move from hotels”, it noted, “Officials have tendered two contracts worth a total of £1.3 million for the removal of asbestos from the site, boiler replacement and the full refurbishment of accommodation blocks.”

While work is not set to begin on the project until January, the Home Office, according to the article, still plans to “start moving migrants to Cameron Barracks by the end of next month [November].” However, department sources told the newspaper that the safety work could delay their timetable.

It was only two years ago that an outbreak of deadly *Legionella* bacteria occurred onboard a barge, the Bibby Stockholm, repurposed as asylum seeker accommodation and moored in Portland Port, Dorset. Despite the discovery of the bacteria in the water system of the Bibby Stockholm, the asylum seekers were kept on board for four days before being evacuated.

Widespread abuse of asylum seekers forced to live in atrocious conditions at another former military site—Royal Air Force Manston in Kent, resulted in around 250 suing the British government for mistreatment under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Set up to house around 1,000 to 1,600 people for less than 24 hours at a time, by autumn 2022 it was housing over 4,000 people for up to 33 days. Fully 18,000 people were held in what lawyers described as “unlawful” and “inhumane” conditions, prompting the calling of a public inquiry. The *Guardian* noted that the overcrowding “in autumn 2022 led to an outbreak of diphtheria and scabies. Newly arrived asylum seekers were forced to sleep on filthy floors or on flattened cardboard boxes, and toilets overflowed with faeces. Women and children were forced to sleep close to unrelated men and there were claims of assaults by guards.”

The demonisation of asylum seekers and immigrants in general become ever filthier, as they are bracketed under the catch-all term “illegal migrant”. Last week the government trumpeted how its latest mass round-ups of workers in takeaways, beauty salons and car washes had

resulted in a total of over 8,000 migrants being detained in 11,000 raids.

The Immigration Enforcement figures covering October last year to September this year, show that over 1,000 people have been deported, it boasted. In a statement implying that Tory government measures in their last year in office were too soft, it said, “Marking the largest enforcement crackdown on illegal working since records began, the data reveals a significant increase year on year of 63% and 51% for arrests and visits, respectively. Over 1,050 foreign nationals encountered on these operations have been removed from the country.”

An October 31 Home Office X posting with an accompanying video showing people being bundled onto planes was published with the wording, “Detained and removed—Dangerous foreign criminals and small boat migrants are being placed on flights out of the UK every single week.”

Another posting read, “We have just had our biggest year for immigration enforcement raids. Now, we’re going even further. We will do whatever it takes to secure our borders.”

An October 28 posting by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood hailed an agreement with Vietnam, as she declared, “For too long, this country has been unable to remove those with no right to be here. This important deal with the Vietnamese will help us ramp up removals of illegal migrants. I will do whatever it takes to secure our borders.”

A Home Office posting the same day read, “Illegal migrant workers exploit the system British people work so hard to pay into,” and another two days earlier” warned, “Those involved in illegal working think they can undercut honest businesses and British workers. We are taking a zero-tolerance approach.”



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