

UK Labour government slashes asylum rights, expands anti-migrant crackdown

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Labour government Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood has launched a sweeping attack on the rights of asylum seekers in the UK, implementing arguably the most severe curtailment of asylum protections since the Second World War.

Until now, asylum seekers whose claims were accepted were granted five years of protection—a limit imposed by Tony Blair’s government. From March, adults and accompanied children claiming asylum will receive only 30 months, after which their cases will be reviewed. Deportation will be enforced if their situation in the country of origin is deemed “safe” at review.

The change is designed to throw vulnerable people into permanent insecurity and to provide repeated opportunities for their removal. The president of the Law Society of England and Wales, Mark Evans, noted that “The changes stand in tension with article 34 of the refugee convention, under which the UK has agreed to facilitate as far as possible the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees.”

Mahmood coupled the announcement with a pilot scheme offering 150 families whose claims had been rejected up to £40,000 to agree to voluntary deportation, giving them seven days to respond. Mahmood’s bottom line was that £40,000 was cheap compared with the annual cost of keeping a family of three in an asylum hostel—£158,000.

Failure to accept the offer will result in enforced removal. According to the *Guardian*, a new Home Office consultation document, “Family Returns: Reforming Asylum Support and Enforcing Family Returns,” states that children may be handcuffed during deportation “to overcome non-compliance.”

Mahmood has also doubled the normal waiting period for settled status in Britain from five to 10 years, with the expectation that this will be extended even further

for many. The changes apply retrospectively to thousands of migrants currently in the system.

Those allowed to stay can only do so under strict conditions, including a valid employment history, no criminal record, absence of debt to the taxpayer, and advanced English proficiency.

In another major attack, as of March 5, financial and accommodation support for asylum seekers was made discretionary. Those with a prison sentence over 12 months, those working—usually in the most poorly paid and exploited sectors—or those deemed to have sufficient resources are excluded from statutory support.

Mahmood’s measures also include restrictions on study visas—targeting applicants from conflict-ridden or impoverished countries such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan—alongside new constraints for visitors from Nicaragua and St Lucia.

In a speech on March 5 at the Institute for Public Policy Research, Mahmood described her proposals as “some of the most significant reforms to migration—both legal and asylum—in a generation.” Her remarks made clear that Labour will continue moving sharply to the right, despite its recent by-election humiliation by the Greens—who stood on a pro-immigration platform, opposing the demonisation of asylum seekers—in the Gorton and Denton by-election.

The government is targeting the electorate of the far-right Reform UK—which came second in the by-election and leads general election polling nationally—by adopting as many of its anti-migrant policies as possible, couching them in the language of traditional Labour “values.”

Labour’s policy changes were timed to coincide with Mahmood’s visit to Denmark, which is governed by a right-wing administration led by Social Democrats

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen that has pioneered a highly restrictive asylum system.

In Copenhagen, Mahmood toured the Center Sandholm, the largest initial detention centre for new asylum seekers where they are first registered with police when arriving in Denmark. Also toured was the Sjælsmark returns centre, a former military barracks housing rejected asylum seekers under strict curfews, with obligations to clean and maintain their living spaces—on pain of fines, imprisonment, or deportation. On paper, residents may leave during the day, but surveillance, fences, and a single exit effectively confine them.

The pro-Labour *Guardian* published a puff piece headlined “Mahmood’s Denmark visit aims to hammer home tough line on immigration.” Speaking to the newspaper, Mahmood said, “There are people who are racist, who do just hate everybody that’s not white and different to them. Those people are not legitimate in this debate.” But everything that came out of her mouth in the interview legitimised the far-right scapegoating of immigrants and asylum seekers.

Mahmood declared, “There are many more people who are frustrated with the broken system, who feel a tremendous amount of resentment because they can see their communities under pressure. Public services are under pressure. People break the rules and they stay in this country. We’re paying for people who’ve got no right to be in this country. Billions of pounds are spent on a system that is fundamentally broken. That resentment is real, and it does have a real-life impact ... The job of responsible politicians is to recognise human nature and resentment and to say: ‘I don’t really want that to turn into something worse.’”

Speaking to the conservative *Telegraph*, Mahmood insisted, “I think the totality of the package will have a deterrent effect. We do know that the ease with which people can come into our system is drawing people in. I think tightening it and making it much more difficult and less attractive for illegal migrants will start to see behavioural change over the next few years.”

Of her draconian enforced returns policy, which even the Tories were not able to carry out, Mahmood stated, “When a country becomes safe, I think that it’s right to say: ‘You can now be safe in your home country, and we’re going to return you.’”

Denmark’s asylum system, which Mahmood

explicitly cites as a model, has dramatically slashed the number of asylum seekers. In 2024 only 860 people were granted asylum, while a temporary programme extended protection to 10,000 Ukrainians. In 2025, 2,600 were deported after their claims were rejected.

Labour’s repressive migration policies are designed not only to appeal to the right. They are aimed at cutting billions from the cost of housing and maintaining asylum seekers—money to be made available to the Ministry of Defence, with the government set to roll out proposals for increasing military spending by tens of billions of pounds over the next decade.

A filthy Home Office news piece was published alongside Mahmood’s proposals, headlined “Asylum handouts and accommodation removed for illegal migrants abusing Britain’s generosity.”

The government boasted that it had “already reduced the number of migrants in asylum hotels by 19% in the past year (to the end of December 2025), and overall asylum support costs by 15% in the last financial year (to the end of March 2025). Tougher rules like those set out could help reduce this even further and lead to greater savings for the taxpayer.”

Mahmood’s attacks are further proof of European social democrats normalising anti-migrant policies traditionally associated with the far right. They confirm the WSW’s assessment made last May, even before Labour ministers rushed to legitimise the “resentment” of far-right thugs besieging asylum hotels, that “Shorn of its name, conjuring images of a long-abandoned connection to reformism, the Labour government is a far-right formation.”

Among the rights groups opposing the attacks was the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. Spokesperson Griff Ferris warned that “this announcement of mass deportations while also seeking to gut rights protections is frightening, alongside the Home Secretary using openly fascist rhetoric.”



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