

Opposition to the use of asylum camps to house people seeking asylum

FAQ

What is the background to this proposal?

There are new immigration rules due to be launched as part of the Government's mission to "fix the asylum system" making it firm but fair. Additionally, the Government wishes to stop channel crossings by stipulating that the individual should claim asylum in other European Countries (first point of entry) rather than travelling across the channel to the UK. The Government will deem a claim inadmissible if there was an opportunity for the individual to claim asylum in another country.

To facilitate this, the Government is considering placing people in camps whilst waiting for another country to accept the individual and for them to be returned.

Why are camps been proposed now?

At the end of the transition period for leaving the EU, the UK ceased to be bound by the Dublin regulations. This is EU law that determines which EU member State is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum. The Government is arguing that new measures replacing the Dublin rule will offer the UK a more flexible return arrangements. However these arrangements have still to be negotiated.

Are there other reasons?

The camps will also act as a deterrent to both people seeking asylum and the business models of the criminal gangs that seek to put lives at risk by offering a passage by sea and lorry.

I thought the central reason for camps is simply that there are insufficient numbers of suitable houses to home people seeking asylum?

Yes, in addition to the "inadmissibility" rules, the numbers of people that are being accommodated in houses known as NASS accommodation (National Asylum Support Service as it used to be called) has risen from 48,000 to 60,000 (at Sept 2020). The prolonged delays in resolving asylum claims (see data below) and a reduction in cessations or move-ons due to the Pandemic has contributed to the increase. Cessations refers to people being evicted when all appeals have been lost and move on refers to people whose asylum claim has been accepted. Our argument is that other suitable accommodation needs to be sourced, a well run hotel or student accommodation in a city centre would be preferable to a camp.

So what exactly are the problem with camps?

Asylum claims will not be considered for a long period of time as there is no mechanism or agreement in place post Brexit to facilitate returning people to a third country and there is no evidence that countries will accept them. Although the camps are said to be temporary (for up to 12 months) the fear is that will become long term with no opportunities for individuals to integrate with local communities or have easy access to religion, health, education and legal services.

As a consequence there will be a further increase to the asylum application backlog which has already been exacerbated by the Pandemic. The asylum system is already far too slow (please see data below) creating problems for the individual with their life on hold, for the tax payer as the Government package already exceeds £1 billion; and towns under places pressure for housing.

Other specific problems include:

- ◆ families will be separated as the camps are for men only (at the moment)
- ◆ high risk of infection due to over crowding and shared facilities
- ◆ minimal opportunities for recreation and exercise
- ◆ a lack of dedicated physical and mental health support
- ◆ poor quality food (well referenced in the media). People are provided with bland microwave meals and lack fresh fruit and vegetables.
- ◆ camps which may be designed for 300 - 500 people will in practice get more and more crowded, as has happened in refugee caps around the world. Out of sight, out of mind.
- ◆ isolated camps will become like detention centres, with a corresponding potential risk of abuse. The perceived need to control the behaviour of large numbers of people may lead to repressive and inhumane behaviour by staff
- ◆ corralling so many people together within a camp will increase their feelings of stress and anxiety and may increase the risk of self harm and suicide
- ◆ The Home Office will contract out the running of the camps to private companies on the basis of lowest cost and avoiding direct responsibility
- ◆ People will lack access to immigration advice, English lessons and other education
- ◆ they will lack contact with normal life, and will lack information about how long they will be kept there and what they can expect in the future.
- ◆ People will be bored and left in limbo, wasting their time.
- ◆ They may be targets for abusive anti-migrant groups (as seen at Penally)

In contrast, living in the community:

- ◆ People can live a reasonably degree of normal life, autonomy and dignity
- ◆ People can access religious, social, health, legal and education services
- ◆ People can integrate with their local community
- ◆ People can attend local churches, mosques or temples. (often this is very important to them)

The Government has already been taken to court over its inhumane treatment of asylum seekers in former barracks accommodation and has started moving people into more suitable accommodation.

We ask that the Home Office ensure a fairer, effective, quicker asylum process which will reduce the pressure on houses. The new “inadmissibility” rules will create even greater inefficiency and delays. The asylum process needs to be fixed which will save money and reduce the pressure on housing. The new rules only serve to prevent people trying to claim asylum and make life exceptionally difficult for those that do attempt to legally seek asylum in our country.

What are the specific issues for Barton Stacey?

This is an isolated camp in a field next to a fast A road, 7 miles from the nearest town of Andover in Hampshire. The estimated population of Barton Stacey in 2016 is 1,034 making the addition of an extra 300 people a sudden increase of 30%. There are no facilities nearby which can be safely or reasonably accessed by foot.

Data

We hear a lot of confusion around the numbers of people applying for asylum - what are the real figures?

	Dec 2018	Dec 2019	Sept 2020
Number of people awaiting an asylum decision	29016	43649	50179
Number of people waiting more than 6 months for a decision	12213	22563	36093

(From Government data at [https://www.gov.uk/statistics/immigration-statistics-year ending-September-2020](https://www.gov.uk/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-September-2020))

But , we hear that the UK resettles more refugees from outside Europe than any other EU member state and indeed the Government also makes this claim - is this not correct?

This is correct, but there's some important context which many people might not have picked up from the wording. The term “resettled” is very important here. “Resettled refugees” are not all refugees which a country might take in. It refers to refugees who were resettled in a new country as part of a specific scheme run by that country. Most refugees arrive in the EU as asylum seekers, not as people being

resettled as part of a scheme. In reality four EU countries granted asylum to more refugees than the UK in 2017, and three did in 2018.

Resettlement through a national scheme is not the only way to become a refugee in another country. Most refugees who are granted protection in the EU don't arrive this way.

How many refugees settle in the UK each year?

The following is a snapshot at 2018. Please see

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01403/> for updated and through figures.

2018

Resettled = 5,806

Granted Asylum = 7,636 before appeal

Granted alternative form of protection = 2,449

TOTAL = 15,891 of which 13,442 are refugees.

Granted Asylum after appeal 17,205 of which 13,845 after an appeal.

Germany - 139,555

Italy - 47,885

France - 41,440

Austria - 20,700

Sweden - 19,605

The picture is the same for 2017 with all but Italy granting more refugee status than the UK

Excluding asylum applications where the outcome was unknown but including those who were successful on appeal, only 35% of asylum applications to the UK were granted in 2017 the lowest level since 2006.

These figures do not include countries outside Europe. There are approx 80 million refugees globally and 85% are taken in by the poorest countries in the world.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2018/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#asylum-resettlement-and-protection>

(Cited by Get the Facts: Asylum Seekers and refugees fullfact.org)

So what *should* happen to these individuals whilst they are waiting for their asylum appeal to be resolved?

We believe that the Home Office should continue to accommodate people in decent quality shared housing (community based accommodation). They presently receive a financial allowance of £39.63 per week either by a debit card or a payment card (if asylum has been refused and awaiting an appeal) (www.gov.uk asylum support)

What if the Home Office decides to go ahead with building a camp at Barton Stacey?

SWVG would like to work with other national and local organisations and individuals to help and support people who are accommodated there. We can provide clothing, English classes and friendly social contact with people.

Why do some people choose the UK to apply for asylum?

There are many reasons for they, but they include:

- They have family members in the UK because of this country's past
- There is an existing community of people from their own country here - social networks are very important
- English is an important international language. They almost all learn English at school, have seen English films and listen to English music
- They think that "the UK is a good place to be human" (said to me on a number of occasions)

In Summary:

We call on the Home Office to:

- stop the opening of all new camps and close existing barracks accommodation
- provide community based housing for those seeking asylum
- urgently address the backlog of asylum applications
- create a fair, equitable and effective asylum system based on humanity, compassion and the rule of law

Please note that some of the material for these FAQs has been taken from a Parliamentary question on 16th Dec 2021 raised by the Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP

Further reading:

<https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Fixing-Britains-broken-asylum-system-November-2020.pdf>

<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n05/frances-webber/short-cuts>