

Ministers admit trying to forcibly remove tens of thousands of people

System 'in chaos' as nearly half of enforced removals are cancelled, many of them after successful legal challenges

Diane Taylor

The Guardian, Friday 22 March 2013 16:56 GMT



Figures show almost half of enforced removals were cancelled. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA Wire/Press Association Images

The government has admitted that it has tried to forcibly remove tens of thousands of people from the UK unlawfully.

The figures were disclosed to the Guardian after a [freedom of information](#) request which showed that almost half of the enforced removals the government attempted were cancelled.

Critics say the high number of cancellations and attempted unlawful removals are signs of a system in chaos.

In 2012, 14,435 enforced removals took place but between January and November 11,085 were cancelled. The figure for the full year is likely to be about 12,000 cancelled removals, almost half of the total.

Of those cancelled, 4,569 were halted because the courts said they were unlawful. In the past five years, 48,858 removals have been cancelled, 22,079 of them owing to successful legal challenges.

The figures relate to asylum seekers and non-asylum seekers; some people may have been subjected to more than one cancelled removal attempt. There have also been 3,753 cancelled deportations of people who have committed criminal offences, 1,450 of which were because of successful legal challenges.

Some enforced removals were cancelled because of problems with escorting the people out of the country. In 2011, 114 removals were cancelled owing to escort problems but last year this figure quadrupled to 450.

The high number of cancelled removals has a variety of implications. There is an estimated cost of the administration costs of removing each person is £186 for each cancelled removal – a total cost of almost £10m over the last five years, excluding the cost of extra detention, courts and cancelled flights. In his recent evidence to the House of Lords justice committee, the lord chief justice said that immigration, asylum and nationality judicial reviews took up a vast amount of the court's time.

Keith Vaz, chair of the Commons home affairs select committee, said: "I am very concerned to note the number of enforced removals cancelled since 2008.

"These cancellations cause distress and uncertainty for deportees. The committee has been very clear that the quality of initial decision-making by the UK Border Agency must be improved. It is unacceptable that the number cancelled due to escort problems has quadrupled in just one year. UKBA needs to look carefully at their procurement processes and ensure they keep an up-to-date register of high-risk companies, as the committee recommended."

James Packer, head of immigration at Duncan Lewis solicitors, said a system in which almost half of enforced removals were cancelled, many because of successful legal challenges, could not be described as working effectively.

"UKBA consistently makes decisions to remove on the basis of information that is out of date – often years out of date – and then systematically delays its consideration of any new information until the 11th hour. A system run in this manner will inevitably result in last-minute cancellations of removal in many cases. This is a separate issue to the errors that pervade the shambolic administration of the UK's immigration system."

Emma Mlotshwa, of the charity Medical Justice, which provides support to detainees, many of whom face enforced removal, said: "This is a system in chaos. We deal with countless cases of enforced removals which are cancelled. The whole thing causes needless trauma to detainees. Taking someone to the plane and then back to a detention centre, keeping them under imminent threat of deportation, is inhuman and treats detainees no better than cargo."

UKBA said: "Where UKBA and the courts find that an individual has no right to be in the UK we expect them to leave. Where they refuse, we will enforce their removal."

"We will investigate any allegations that contractors are not meeting UKBA's expectations."

"If standards are not met then UKBA can take appropriate action to recoup payments in accordance with the agreed contractual arrangements. 'Escorting issues' cover a range of issues and do not relate on every occasion to a failure by the contractor." Ukba added that some of those whose enforced removals were halted were ultimately found not to be entitled to stay in the UK and that most air fares were refundable or rebookable.

Case study: Winston, 32, refugee from Zimbabwe

"I was a member of the Movement for Democratic Change and was attacked and beaten by government forces. My house was burnt down and my family was scattered. Two weeks after I arrived in the UK in 2007 my asylum claim was refused. I was placed in detention between March and November 2010. UKBA tried to remove me four times. Each time it was very traumatic. I was placed in an isolation cell before being taken to the airport. All I could think about was that the British government was going to deliver me back into the hands of the people who had persecuted me. Each time I was taken to the airport my removal was cancelled. In July 2012 I was granted refugee status."

More from the Guardian [What's this?](#)

[Australians don't know how lucky they are](#) 21 Mar 2013

[Justin Welby's ascension shines light on powerful evangelical church](#) 20 Mar 2013

[Ready-to-eat salads blamed for illness outbreak](#) 19 Mar 2013

[Mother and son, 3, killed by rush-hour train](#) 22 Mar 2013

[Silk Road: the online drug marketplace that officials seem powerless to stop](#) 22 Mar 2013

[Nick Clegg abandons illegal immigrant amnesty proposal](#) 22 Mar 2013

More from around the [What's this?](#)

web

[Bedroom tax is coming - here's what you can do](#) (Shelter)

[Rebuild your credit rating](#) (Your Wealth)

[Relocating to Dubai? What You Need to Know](#) (HSBC Expat Explorer)

[How a 6-Year-Old Helped Solve the World Water Crisis](#) (Charity Water)

[How to Have A Perfect Morning. Every Morning](#) (The TIBCO Blog)

[Ten iPhone Apps Worth Paying For](#) (Dummies.com)

Ads by Google

Top Penny Shares to Buy

Join the Stock Tips Team & Discover the Finest Penny Shares

www.Stock-Tips.co.uk

Stocks And Shares ISA

Market Leading ISA Offer. Terms And ISA Rules Apply. Capital At Risk

www.fidelity.co.uk/ISAoffer

Equity Release Calculator

Unlock The Cash Tied Into Your Home Over 55? Use Our Calculator Today!

www.Keyrs.co.uk/Equity-Calculator

Related information

UK news

[Immigration and asylum](#)

Politics

[Freedom of information](#)

Law

Society



The jobseekers bill: a shameful retroactive stitch-up

21 Mar 2013

Eric Metcalfe: The coalition claims to be proud of our legal sector, but after the Cait Reilly case it has simply rewritten the law in its own favour

14 Mar 2013

Council on-the-spot fines exploit residents, Eric Pickles warns

10 Mar 2013

Betrayed by British justice: Marina Litvinenko's tale

9 Mar 2013

Why a cohabitation agreement is essential for non-married couples

Why aren't sexual abuse reforms being applied to asylum seekers?

8 Mar 2013

Fiona Bawdon: According to charity Asylum Aid, many rape victims face a culture of disbelief