



Refugees

Home Office hotels for asylum seekers 'akin to detention centres' - report

Diane Taylor

Thu 16 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Conditions in hotels used by the Home Office to accommodate asylum seekers during the pandemic are akin to detention centres, according to a report that also says accommodation is often sub-standard and sometimes unsafe.

[The report, *Safe Environment: investigating the use of temporary accommodation to house asylum seekers during the Covid-19 outbreak*](#), explores experiences in hotels and similar accommodation. It was conducted by academics at Edinburgh Napier University in partnership with grassroots organisation Migrants Organising for Rights and Empowerment.

More than 50 asylum seekers in Glasgow provided information for the research. Although it is the local authority that has the largest number of dispersed asylum seekers in the UK, the experiences are broadly similar to hotels and other emergency accommodation in other towns and cities such as [Napier barracks](#) in Folkestone. Lawyers and NGOs have documented a deterioration in the mental and physical health of asylum seekers as a result of spending extended periods of time in this accommodation.

At the start of the pandemic the Home Office increased its use of hotels almost tenfold from 1,200 in March 2020 to 9,500 by October 2020. The rationale was to reduce the spread of Covid and create a “safe environment” for asylum seekers.

Glasgow was the scene of the [fatal shooting](#) by police of Sudanese asylum seeker Badreddin Abadlla Adam, 28, in June 2020 after he stabbed six people at the Park Inn Hotel, which was being used to accommodate asylum seekers.

Last week a distressed asylum seeker climbed on to the roof of the Crowne Plaza Hotel close to Heathrow and threatened to jump. He is thought to have slipped off the roof and was not seriously injured. Police said he was detained under the Mental Health Act following the incident but fellow asylum seekers at the hotel said he was sent back there the following day. They said he was in a state of acute mental distress when he threatened to jump from the roof.

The report highlights problems with people losing the cash payments they had to buy food and other essentials in their previous Home Office accommodation which was often shared houses, when they were moved into hotels. There are few cooking facilities in hotels and restrictions on their mobility and on visits from friends. One interviewee was told the Home Office could decide to deport them if they refused to go into the new emergency accommodation, another was told they had too much luggage for a destitute person.

Particular concerns were raised about a mother and baby unit in Glasgow used to accommodate more than 20 female asylum seekers who are either pregnant or have recently given birth. The unit opened in October 2020 and the women criticised the cramped and unsafe conditions, said it was impossible to babyproof the kitchenettes, that there was nowhere to sit and breastfeed comfortably and that baby baths had to be bent to fit into the showers.

One woman said: “I’m even taller than the bed. I have to squeeze myself so I can sleep.”

Jeremy Bloom, solicitor at Duncan Lewis Solicitors, who has brought legal challenges about conditions in hotel accommodation, said: “The findings of this report very much chime with what we are seeing on the ground. I have seen the poor quality of accommodation lead directly to suicide attempts by asylum seekers, who are often extremely vulnerable and who suffer from PTSD, depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions.”

A Home Office spokesperson said: “The report in question contains a number of factual inaccuracies, is based on a limited sample size and the Home Office has not been asked to provide any evidence or direct input into the report. During the height of an unprecedented health pandemic, to ensure asylum seekers were not left destitute, additional accommodation was required at extremely short notice.”

A spokesperson for its accommodation contractor, Mears, said: “We recognise that living in hotel accommodation for an extended period has been difficult for our service users and we have been moving people to dispersed accommodation as quickly as possible.” He added that the mother and baby unit had been designed with advice from the NHS and the local

authority and that now needs were changing. “We are planning to accommodate mothers and babies in dispersed accommodation in the future.”