



Last updated: April 2009

United Kingdom Detention Profile

Introduction

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During the past several years, the United Kingdom has significantly expanded its use of detention as a response to the influx of asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants arriving on its shores. By 2009, the country had the capacity to confine some 3,000 people in immigration detention facilities, a ten-fold increase from the early 1990s. In addition, between 1993 and 2004, five significant asylum-related policies were introduced as part of a broader effort to cap asylum numbers and reduce instances of abuse of the asylum system (Bacon 2005).

Media, NGOs, and international organisations have criticized the UK's detention practices. Among the concerns are the role given private security companies in managing detention centres, the detention of children, increasing instances of detention of ex-criminal foreigners after they have served their criminal sentences, and the controversial practice of immigration detention without time-limits.

Detention policy. The 1971 Immigration Act first introduced immigration detention for those denied initial entry to the UK (Bacon 2005, p. 5). According to the act, immigration officers have the authority to detain or grant temporary admission to people through administrative discretion (*Immigration Act 1971*, § 4). The UK Border Agency (UKBA) is responsible for removing all persons from the UK who do not have the legal right to be there, including those who enter illegally, overstay their visas, breach their conditions of stay, are subject to a deportation action, or have been refused asylum (UKBA 2009b). Unauthorized immigrants can depart voluntarily, either independently or with the support of the International Organisation for Migration's Assisted Voluntary Return programme (Home Office 2008, p. 15). Those who opt out of voluntary departure can be issued a deportation order by the Home Secretary and be detained under the Immigration Act for examination or removal (UKBA 2009b). All detainees have the right to apply for bail to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT), however release rates are low, particularly for detainees with criminal convictions (London Detainee Support Group 2009, p. 10). The Border Agency's *Enforcement Instructions and Guidance* states, "Detention must be used sparingly, and for the shortest period necessary" (UKBA 2009a, chp. 55.1.3).

In 1998, the UK government issued a White Paper entitled *Fairer, Faster and Firmer - A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum*, which sought to distinguish between the detention of illegal immigrants and asylum applicants. It stressed that temporary admission or release was the preferred measure for asylum applicants, and that detention should be used only as a last resort—after alternatives to detention have been considered (UKBA 2005). In 2007, a new "fast-track" process was introduced for reviewing and deciding asylum cases, which set as a target the conclusion of 40 percent of cases within six months of receiving the application. By 2011 the UK Border Agency has set the target of completing 90 percent of cases within six months. According to the UKBA, this will be achieved by "liaising with foreign governments to encourage them to accept back their own citizens; increasing surveillance at ports to reduce the number of illegal entrants; stepping up enforcement activity; and expanding secure accommodation for those awaiting removal" (UKBA 2008). Critics of this new policy claim that fast tracking the asylum assessment process will lead to increased rates of asylum seeker rejections and subsequent deportations (London NoBorders 2009).

The European Parliament raised concerns about the unlimited duration of detention in the UK in its 2007 report on the conditions in centres for third country nationals in the 25 EU member states, recommending that this practice should be eliminated (European Parliament 2007). In September 2008, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe examined the UK's practice of detention without time limits and recommended that the country introduce a limit (*BBC News* 2008). While a time limit of five consecutive days exists for those detained in immigration offices at ports of entry, police stations, or mobile detention facility vehicles (UKBA 2009b), of the 2,250 people detained in official immigration sites at the end of 2008, 150 had been detained for over a year, and 240 for between four and six months (Home Office 2008, p. 18). Research conducted by the London Detainee Support Group reveals significant numbers of indefinite detainees developing mental health problems, self-harming, or attempting suicide (London Detainee Support Group 2009, p. 5). The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns publishes statistics on instances of self-harm in Immigration Detention, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. During January-September 2008, there were 179

incidences of “self-harm requiring medical treatment”; 1,404 detainees had been placed on “formal self-harm at risk” during the same period (NCADC 2008).

In 2006, a policy was introduced that permitted the detention of those facing deportation after serving prison sentences (London Detainee Support Group 2009, p. 6). This policy has led to increasing instances of the detention of ex-offenders, many of whom are stateless, having spent many years in the UK prior to serving prison sentences. The UKBA claims that these harsher detention measures are designed to protect the public against re-offences and absconding. The London Detainee Support Group, on the other hand, claims that ex-offenders are denied “meaningful dialogue” with the UKBA, and are frequently embroiled in complicated processes that have little bearing on the resolution of their cases, in addition to having lost their status in the UK and being detained under immigration law for periods that go far beyond their original criminal sentences (London Detainee Support Group 2009, p. 30-31).

Detention infrastructure. Migrants and asylum seekers can be detained in a variety of locations, including official immigration detention centres (removal centres) and short-term holding facilities (STHF) located inside or near airport terminals. STHFs hold passengers detained upon arrival to investigate their requests for entry and those awaiting imminent deportation. These facilities are not designed for overnight stays. People can also be held at immigration offices at ports of entry; control zones authorized in the Immigration Act 1971; premises of legal appeal; any police station or hospital; young offender institutions; prison or remand centres; or any vehicle that has been specifically designed or adapted for use as a mobile detention facility and approved by the Secretary of State for such use (Immigration Direction 2009).

As of March 2009, the UK maintained 11 official immigration detention centres, with a total capacity of 2,935 places, representing a significant increase from its capacity of 250 in 1993 (Bacon 2005, p. 2). As of early 2009, the Home Office had plans to expand its detention capacity, in particular by building an 800-bed centre near Bullingdon prison in Oxfordshire, which would be the largest detention centre in Europe (*BBC News* 2009; Kitchen 2009).

The 11 dedicated immigration detention centres are secure facilities that fall under the authority of the UK Border Agency. Seven of the facilities hold only men, and the remaining four centres detain women in separate areas from men. Three of the facilities cater for families, including Dungavel, Tinsley House, and Yarl’s Wood (UKBA Website). In 2007, the European Parliament found that while unaccompanied minors are not detained in the UK, children accompanied by a parent and families are detained, and recommended that the detention of all minors (as well as pregnant women) should be prohibited in the future (European Parliament 2007). Recent media reports claim that some 2,000 children are detained in immigration removal centres each year in the UK, half of whom are held at Yarl’s Wood, and “the experience they described is prison in all but name” (Dugan 2009). During a 2009 inspection, the Children’s Commissioner for England found that “basic safeguards for children in Yarl’s Wood are failing... with children forced to remain in custody even when they were seriously ill or in danger from parents with mental health problems” (Dugan 2009). Access to basic healthcare was also described as inadequate, with reports of an infant being held in detention suffering from pneumonia, and a teenager with severe mental health problems.

The UK Border Agency operates six STHFs at Heathrow airport: one in each of the five terminals and a sixth in the Queen’s Building, all managed by a private contractor, G4S. These holding rooms are designed to facilitate further questioning of incoming passengers denied immediate entry into the country. Complaints of STHFs include lack of natural light, lighting that cannot be turned off, poor ventilation, uncomfortable seating arrangements, and no proper facilities for sleeping or washing. The Queen’s Building facility caters to people who are awaiting immediate removal on flights from the airport (Independent Monitoring Board 2009).

The very first immigration detention centres, opened in the UK in the 1970s, were run by the private sector. This decision was made with the view to ensure that non-prisoners would not be subject to the oppressive treatment criminals faced under the guard of prison or police officers (George and Button 2001 in Bacon 2005). Today, eight of the 11 dedicated immigration detention centres are managed by one of three private contractors, G4S, Serco, or GEO Group. Three facilities are operated by HM Prison Service (UKBA Website). A 2005 study published by the University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre reports that these companies also operate prisons in other countries and are persistent lobbyists in the arena of detention policy (Bacon 2005, p. 16). Private contractors are provided with a fee per inmate per day, rendering immigration detention an extremely lucrative business (Bacon 2005, p. 16). Reports the Refugee Studies Centre, “The growth of the detention regime is not based solely on ever-restrictive asylum laws and policies. Its growth can also be attributed to the involvement [of] private contractors, whose logic of response to asylum seekers has very little to do with the logic of the government’s response, concerned as they are with winning and maintaining contracts and keeping their facilities full” (Bacon 2005, p. 2).

In 2005, the UK Border Agency issued the *Detention Services Operating Standards Manual for Immigration Service Removal Centres* in an effort to improve the performance of private contractors and bring them into compliance with UK policy. The standards, which build on the Detention Centre Rules, include details on the provision of legal services, accommodation, activities for detainees, admission and discharge protocol, the detention of families with children, the detention of female detainees, the provision of health care and a number of other areas of concern for detainees (UKBA 2005).

There have been numerous media reports of alleged assaults and beatings of asylum seekers by private security guards during the detention and removal process. In 2008, a coalition of NGOs detailed some 300 cases of alleged assaults that took place during 2004-2008. The allegations came from people from over 41 countries, with the majority being made by African migrants. The report raised concerns about the complaints procedure within the centres, stating that the current procedure was largely ineffective (Birnberg Peirce & Partners et al. 2008). *The Independent* has also reported on the traumatic nature of the initial detention process for “illegal foreigners” already residing in the UK. It describes “dawn raids” conducted by up to 20 officers, who literally enter and raid the house of an undocumented family in the early hours of the morning, using violence to round up the family members (Dugan 2009).

Facts and figures. Of the more than one hundred million people who arrived at UK ports of entry in 2008, 26,760 were refused entry (Home Office 2008, p. 9). As of 27 December 2008, 2,190 people were held in immigration detention centres and an additional 55 people were being detained at short-term holding facilities. In addition, 526 immigration detainees who had completed prison sentences were recorded as being held in prisons on 1 December 2008 (Home Office in London Detainee Support Group 2009). Also, 1,525 persons who had sought asylum at some stage were being detained solely under Immigration Act powers, representing 68 percent of all immigration detainees. Forty people detained solely under Immigration Act powers were recorded as being less than 18 years of age, 30 of whom had been in detention for less than 29 days, 5 for between 29 days and two months, and the remainder for between two and three months (Home Office 2008, p. 18). Of the 2,250 people detained in official immigration sites at the end of 2008, 675 had been in detention for less than 29 days, 475 for between 29 days and two months, 410 for between two and four months, 240 for between four and six months, 295 for between six months and a year, and the remaining 150 for over a year (Home Office 2008, p. 18)

In 2008, 66,275 persons were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK (Home Office 2008, p. 3). Of these, 32,155 persons were initially refused entry at port, 4,295 persons left under Assisted Voluntary Return programmes, and 8,720 were other voluntary departures. The UK Border Agency met its target to remove 5,000 foreign national prisoners in 2008, with 5,395 foreign national prisoners removed. A total of 16,275 people were removed from the UK upon leaving detention, having been held solely under Immigration Act powers in 2008. Of these, 7,015 (43 percent) were asylum detainees; 610 were children. 10,745 (66 percent of the total removed) left from a UK Border Agency Removal Centre and 5,525 (34 percent) left from a UK Border Agency Short Term Holding Facility (Home Office 2008, p. 17-18).

According to a study by the London School of Economics, an estimated 525,000-950,000 irregular residents lived in the UK by the end of 2007, a significant increase from the 310,000-570,000 estimate produced by the Home Office based on the 2001 census (Travis 2009).

The number of asylum applicants to the UK increased 8 percent in 2008 (30,545) compared to the year before; 19,420 initial asylum decisions were made during 2008, excluding dependants, a decrease of 11 percent compared to 2007; 70 percent of initial decisions in 2008 were refusals (Home Office 2008, p. 3). In addition, 11,640 asylum seekers were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK in 2008, 15 per cent fewer than in 2007 (Home Office 2008, p. 15-17).



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List of Detention Sites

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Name	Status (Year)	Location	Facility Type	Security	Authority	Management	Capacity	Reported Population on a Single Day	Demographics & Segregation
Brook House Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	London Gatwick Airport, Gatwick	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	G4S	426 (2009)		Adult males only (2009)
Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Kidlington, Oxfordshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	GEO Group Ltd	216 (2009)	190 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Harmondsworth, West Drayton, Middlesex	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	Serco Ltd.	308 (2009)	300 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males and females. Gender segregation. (2009)
Dover Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Western heights, Dover, Kent	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	HM Prison Service	314 (2009)	310 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Dungavel House Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Strathaven, South Lanarkshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	G4S	190 (2009)	170 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males and females. Gender segregation; family units. (2009)
Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Harmondsworth, West Drayton	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	GEO Group Ltd	259 (2009)	250 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Haslar Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Gosport, Hampshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	HM Prison Service	160 (2009)	135 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Lindholme Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Hatfield Woodhouse, Nr Doncaster, South Yorkshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	HM Prison Service	112 (2009)	110 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Oakington Immigration Removal Centre (Oakington Reception Centre)	In use (2009)	Longstanton, Cambridgeshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	G4S	408 (2009)	335 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males only (2009)
Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Gatwick Airport, Gatwick, West Sussex	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	G4S	116 (males); 5 (females); 4 (families) (2009)	90 (as of 27 December 2008)	Adult males and females; families. Gender segregation; family units. (2009)
Yar's Wood Removal Centre	In use (2009)	Clapham, Bedfordshire	Migrant detention centre	Secure	Home Office, UK Border Agency	Serco Ltd.	405 (2009)	300 (as of 27 December 2008)	Females and families only. Family units. (2009),

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(This is only a partial list. More detailed information is available upon request.)

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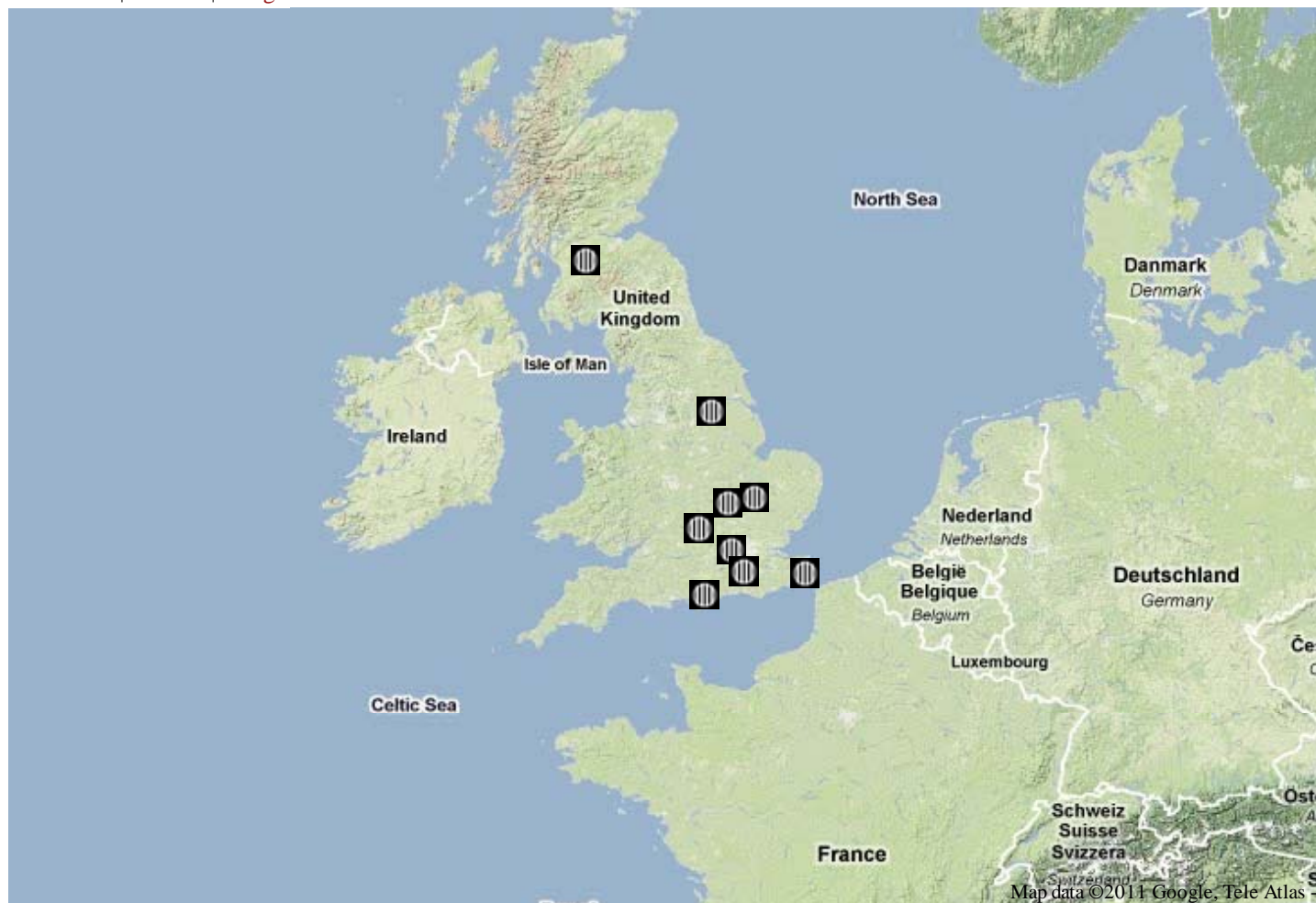
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Map of "In Use" Detention Sites

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Government Agencies

UK Border Agency

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>

U.K. Home Office

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

International Organizations

International Labour Organization: Office for the United Kingdom and Ireland

http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/eurpro/london_r/index.htm

International Organization for Migration - UK Country Information

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/pid/1380>

International Organization for Migration - UK

<http://www.iomlondon.org>

UNHCR - UK

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk>

NGOs and Research Institutions

Amnesty International - UK

www.amnesty.org.uk

Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees

<http://www.aviddentention.org.uk>

Asylum Welcome

www.asylum-welcome.supanet.com

Bail for Immigration Detainees

www.biduk.org

British Refugee Council

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Campaign to Close Campsfield

<http://www.closecampsfield.org.uk/>

Corporate Watch

<http://corporatewatch.org.uk>

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

www.gdwg.org.uk

Immigration Advisory Service

www.iasuk.org

Jesuit Refugee Service - UK

www.jrsuk.net

London Detainee Support Group

<http://www.detainedlives.org>

Medical Justice and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

<http://www.medicaljustice.org.uk>

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

<http://www.ndac.org.uk>

Private Contractors

G4S

<http://www.g4s.com/uk>

GEO Group Inc.

<http://www.thegeogroupinc.com>

SERCO

<http://www.serco.co.uk>

Media

BBC News

<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>

Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Independent

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