

Home Office to Penalise Asylum Seekers Who Refuse Hotel Transfers under New Enforcement Rules

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The United Kingdom's (UK) Home Office has introduced a new "Failure to Travel" policy that will withdraw accommodation and financial support from asylum seekers who refuse relocation from hotels to alternative housing without valid justification. The move seeks to curb the use of

costly hotels, restore fairness in the system, and deter what officials describe as rule-breaking behaviour.

Under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and Asylum Support Regulations, compliance with travel arrangements is a condition of receiving lodging and subsistence support. The updated guidance clarifies that refusal to move, without an acceptable reason, can result in the immediate removal of both housing and financial entitlement.

The policy has been enacted following unrest at the Bell Hotel in Epping, Essex, where protests broke out after charges were filed against an individual residing there. Demonstrators, including far-right groups, clashed with police over concerns regarding local asylum housing. Nine people were arrested and several officers were injured during the disturbances.

As of March 2025, more than 32,000 asylum seekers remained housed in hotels, costing the taxpayer an estimated £5.8 million per day. The Government has pledged to eliminate hotel use by 2029, projecting potential savings of at least £1 billion annually through the enforcement regime and a transition to more cost-effective accommodation.

Refugee organisations and legal charities have raised concerns, arguing that refusals often stem from poor communication, unsuitable accommodation, or unrecognised vulnerabilities, rather than wilful non-compliance. They have warned that the policy risks penalising individuals who may have legitimate grounds for delay or refusal to relocate.

Ministers argue that introducing consequences for refusal will discourage misuse of the system and expedite the closure of expensive hotel

contracts, some of which carry liabilities exceeding £2 billion annually. Reactions from local authorities have been mixed. Councils, including Coventry and Hillingdon, have warned that sudden evictions could push vulnerable individuals into homelessness and increase pressure on local services. Some councils are reportedly considering legal challenges unless the Government provides clearer guidance and additional funding support.

The Home Office has stated that appeals and exemptions will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure both fairness and system integrity. How effectively the policy is implemented, particularly in terms of communication and consistency, will determine whether it achieves its goals or triggers unintended social consequences.