

Profiting from People

Inside the UK's
Asylum Hotels

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ADVANCING JUSTICE FOR MIGRANTS IN THE UK

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RAMFEL

The Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London (RAMFEL) is a company limited by guarantee (no. 08737163) and a registered charity (no. 1155207).

We provide advice to migrants in the community on issues related to their immigration and asylum claims, welfare/benefits, access to housing and prevention of destitution, and holistic casework support. Our immigration and asylum advice service is accredited by the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA). In addition to our advice service, RAMFEL actively challenges discriminatory practices and procedures and campaigns for migrants in the UK to be treated more humanely.

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Acknowledgements

RAMFEL would like to thank the clients who courageously shared their personal experiences of life in hotel accommodation. Your voices are central to this report and crucial in highlighting the human impact of current asylum policies.

We are also grateful to Leigh Day, for their legal expertise and steadfast support, and to the Strategic Legal Fund (SLF); which is managed by the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association; for their financial support, which initially provided funding to pursue a legal challenge against the use of hotels. Whilst ultimately this was not possible, without this funding and SLF's support we would have been unable to document and evidence the systemic failures caused by ongoing hotel use.

Introduction

For decades, the UK has promised to provide safety and dignity to people fleeing persecution. Yet today, tens of thousands of people seeking asylum find themselves trapped in hotels for months or even years on end. Originally designed as a short-term, emergency measure, hotel accommodation has become the backbone of the asylum system - a system that is failing on every level. Though politicians claim that these hotels are luxurious and akin to 5-star all inclusive holidays, the reality is very different.

Families are crammed into single rooms, children are malnourished and people with serious health conditions are left without the support they need. While residents endure this neglect, a handful of private contractors pocket billions of pounds of public money, enriching their shareholders from public contracts. Politicians of all parties have promised change, but behind misleading statistics and political spin lies the stark truth: lives are being destroyed, and racial division is being fuelled in the pursuit of profit.

This report sets out the reality of hotel life, the profiteering behind it, and how a hostile political climate and rampant privatisation enable it. Drawing on first-hand testimony from RAMFEL clients, caseworkers, and medical professionals, it lays bare the human cost of government inaction. Our findings are clear: the hotel system is unsafe, unsustainable, and deeply inhumane.

Policy Context

Hotel accommodation was originally designed to be an emergency measure for people seeking asylum at immediate risk of homelessness and destitution. Under section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the government could place people in hotels while their claims for longer-term support under section 95 were assessed. This system was intended to provide short-term relief, with the expectation that people would be swiftly moved into dispersal accommodation - typically a house or flat - alongside modest weekly subsistence payments.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, asylum seekers would largely be moved to emergency B&B accommodation for a few days at most before being dispersed. People entering the asylum system would spend days or, at most, a few weeks in hotels before being moved into more suitable accommodation. However, the pandemic marked the collapse of this pathway. A lack of available dispersal properties, combined with government inaction, resulted in people seeking asylum remaining in hotels for months or even years.^[1]

[1] IPPR, Transforming Asylum Accommodation, October 2024. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/transforming-asylum-accommodation>

[2] These figures were obtained by the Refugee Council in response to an FOI (freedom of information) request. This is available in the Refugee Council report: "Lives on hold" published in July 2022

[3] Home Office, Immigration system statistics, June 2025. Available at: How many cases are in the UK asylum system? - GOV.UK

The scale of hotel use has exploded. In 2021, 26,380 people were living in hotels across the UK, almost three times the previous year.^[2] In June 2025, official government

Of 30 families we surveyed in March 2025, more than half had lived in hotels for between one and two years, and 10% for more than two years.

figures showed 32,059 people were in hotel accommodation, 8% more than at the end of June 2024.^[3] This recent increase has taken place despite an 18% fall in the initial decision backlog, demonstrating that headline improvements in processing, whilst welcome, are not easing pressures on accommodation.

This is partly because though the government is now processing more claims, the quality of decision-making has worsened. The overall grant rate for Afghan asylum cases, for example, dropped to

48% in the year ending June 2025, down from 99% in 2024.^[4] This surge in refusals means that many people will remain in limbo while challenging flawed decisions at appeal. Consequently, the wider backlog - including appeals at the Immigration Courts - continues to drive more people into asylum housing, with hotels absorbing the greatest strain.^[5]

Hotel stays are now alarmingly long. In September 2024, average stays had stretched to 191 days ^[6] - roughly six months - but RAMFEL's evidence suggests this significantly underestimates the scale of prolonged confinement. Of 30 families we surveyed in March 2025, more than half had lived in hotels for between one and two years, and 10% for more than two years.

The consequences of this policy failure have been well documented. Charities^[7] ^[8], medical professionals^[9], and research institutions^[10] have repeatedly warned of the profound harm to physical and mental health, safety, and dignity caused by prolonged stays in unsuitable hotel conditions. Yet the government, and media, have chosen to demonise those living in hotels rather than address the shortage of dispersal accommodation.

[4] The Migration Observatory, 'Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the UK', September 2025. Available at: Afghan asylum seekers and refugees in the UK - Migration Observatory - The Migration Observatory

[5] Home Office, Immigration system statistics, June 2025. Available at: How many people are granted asylum in the UK? - GOV.UK

[6] Home Office, Asylum Support Update for National Asylum Support Forum (NASF), March 2024

[7] Refugee Council, The experiences of people seeking asylum living in hotel accommodation, April 2021. Available at: <https://www.media.refugeecouncil.org.uk/media/documents/i-sat-watching-my-life-go-by-my-window-for-so-long-23rd-April-2021.pdf>

[8] Helen Bamber Foundation, Suffering and Squalor, June 2024. Available at: <https://helenbamber.org/resources/reportsbriefings/suffering-and-squalor-impact-mental-health-living-hotel-asylum>

[9] Doctors of the World, Access to Healthcare in Initial Contingency Accommodation, April 2022. Available at: DOTW-Access-to-healthcare-in-initial-and-contingency-accommodation-report-April-2022.pdf

[10] IPPR, Transforming Asylum Accommodation, October 2024. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/transforming-asylum-accommodation>

[11] YouTube, Sky News coverage, August 2025. Available at: Criminals will be 'deported to their country of origin' says victims minister

[12] Home Office, Annual Report and Accounts, July 2025. Available at: Home Office Annual Report and Accounts 2024 to 2025

[13] Full Fact, Has the government stopped using hotels? August 2025. Available at: Has the government stopped using hotels to house asylum seekers? - Full Fact

Who profits from this system?

While thousands of people seeking asylum are trapped in degrading, overcrowded and unsuitable hotel accommodation, a small group of private companies are profiting handsomely from this misery. Behind the locked windows, rat infestations, bed bugs and inedible food lies a multi-billion-pound industry built on public contracts, with minimal scrutiny or accountability. The UK's asylum accommodation system has become a lucrative business for a few major players, enriching corporate shareholders while failing the very people it is supposed to support. The UK is also among the countries most reliant on private providers to manage asylum accommodation, whereas in Spain and France, for example, accommodation sites are more commonly managed by NGOs.[14]

In 2019, the government launched the Asylum Accommodation and Support Services Contracts (AASC), alongside the Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility Assistance (AIRE) contract.[15] The AASC contracts, which govern the provision of housing and basic support for people

seeking asylum, were awarded to just three private providers: Clearsprings Ready Homes, Mears Group, and Serco. At the time, the 10-year contracts were estimated to be worth £4 billion. However, costs have since ballooned. In the first seven months of the 2024–25 financial year alone, the government spent £1.7 billion on these contracts. According to the National Audit Office, in 2024/5, hotel accommodation accounted for 76% of the annual cost of asylum contracts but housed only 35% of people in asylum accommodation.[16]

In other words, £1.3 billion out of £1.7 billion in just seven months was spent on hotel-based accommodation.[17] The business of accommodating people seeking asylum in hotels is not only inefficient but it's highly lucrative for the contracted companies.

Between September 2019 and August 2024, Clearsprings, Mears, and Serco collectively made £380 million in profit from asylum housing.[18] That equates to

£1.3 billion out of £1.7 billion in just seven months was spent on hotel-based accommodation.



£146 in pure profit every minute for five years. These figures are not hypothetical or marginal, they represent taxpayer money flowing directly into the hands of private contractors. The National Audit Office found the companies averaged a 7% profit margin[19] - well above what is normally considered acceptable for public sector outsourcing. This bonanza of public money has not only padded company balance sheets but enriched individual executives. One of the company owners, Graham King[20], has even appeared on the Sunday

Times Rich List – and is now listed as a billionaire. It is a stark reminder that while people seeking asylum are forced to live in degrading and overcrowded conditions, others are literally becoming billionaires from their suffering.

As Refugee Action describes, this is the “asylum-industrial complex”[21] – a term capturing how government policy deliberately enables private contractors to

[14] Migration Observatory, Asylum Accommodation in the UK, August 2025. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/asylum-accommodation-in-the-uk/>

[15] GOV UK, New asylum accommodation contracts awarded, January 2019. Available at: New asylum accommodation contracts awarded - GOV.UK

[16] UK Parliament, Home Affairs Committee, May 2025. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/83/home-affairs-committee/news/206734/national-audit-office-report-reveals-asylum-accommodation-cost-home-affairs-select-committee-to-question-accommodation-providers/>

[17] National Audit Office, Home Office Asylum Contracts, May 2025. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/home-offices-asylum-accommodation-contracts.pdf>

[18] The Daily Mail, The ‘migrant hotel kings’ raking in millions from asylum seekers, May 2025. Available at: The ‘migrant hotel kings’ raking in millions from asylum seekers: Bosses of the three firms which have made £380m profit by providing refugee accommodation | Daily Mail Online

[19] National Audit Office, Home Office Asylum Contracts, May 2025. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/home-offices-asylum-accommodation-contracts.pdf>

[20] The Daily Mail, Britain's first billionaire 'migrant hotel king', May 2025. Available at: Britain's first billionaire 'migrant hotel king': Meet the caravan park tycoon who raked in £4.8m of taxpayers' cash PER DAY putting up asylum seekers | Daily Mail Online

[21] Refugee Action, Refugee Action's Most Wanted. Available at: <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/wanted/>

make millions in taxpayer-subsidised profit from hostile accommodation, surveillance, and even military-style operations in the Channel. It's not a 'broken system'. It's a system that functions exactly as intended: punishing refugees while rewarding those who exploit them for profit.

The companies involved have long histories of failure and controversy. Serco, for instance, is widely known for its role in running immigration detention centres and prisons. In 2019, it was fined £1 million for failing to meet its asylum accommodation contractual obligations, yet the following year it was still awarded a £45 million contract to run Covid-19 test-and-trace operations.[22]

Clearsprings has faced repeated media exposés and legal challenges over the substandard conditions in its properties, including housing people in 'rat-infested rooms'[23] and 'clearly falling short of the high standards expected from contractors'.[24] Despite this, Conservative and Labour governments continue to funnel millions to the company.

Mears Group has openly admitted how central asylum accommodation is to its business model. In its 2022 Annual Report, Mears stated that "both financially and operationally, the most significant contracts

for the Group are those under which we provide accommodation and support for people seeking asylum in the North-East of England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland".[25] This is not a humanitarian mission for these firms, it is often their core source of income and growth.

The lack of transparency around these contracts is striking. There is little oversight or independent monitoring, and complaints from residents are frequently ignored. Despite multiple scandals, fines and public outcry, these contractors continue to receive more government money. Meanwhile, people seeking asylum endure appalling conditions: families squeezed into single rooms, disabled people left without access to basic support, children losing weight due to poor nutrition. For private firms, and the government bodies who hire them, this suffering is simply the cost of doing business.

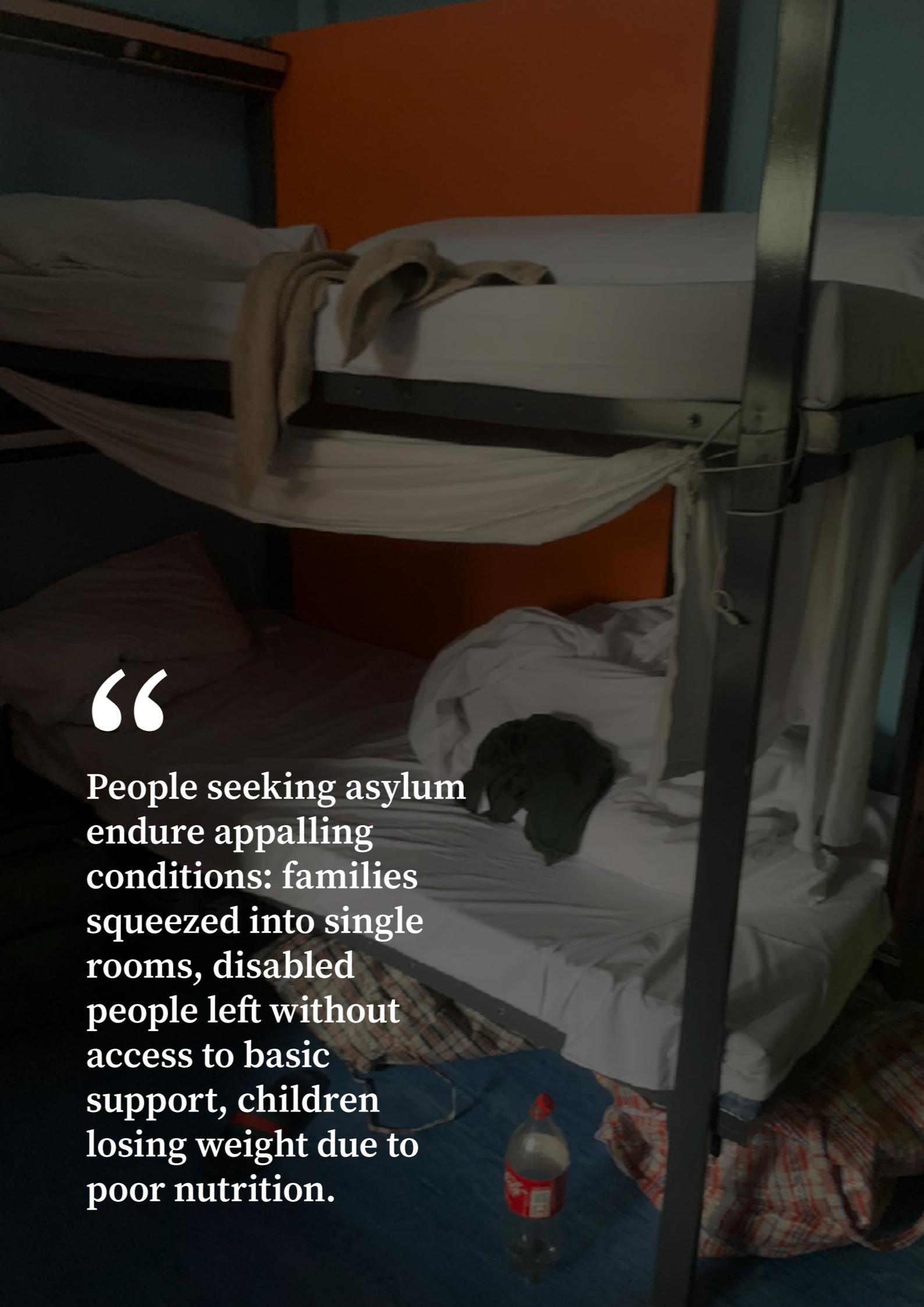
This is not a humanitarian mission for these firms, it is often their core source of income and growth.

[22] The Guardian, Serco wins Covid-19 test and trace contract, June 2020. Available at: Serco wins Covid-19 test-and-trace contract despite £1m fine | Coronavirus | The Guardian

[23] The Guardian, Asylum seekers crammed into rat-infested rooms, August 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/20/asylum-seekers-crammed-into-cockroach-infested-accommodation-home-office>

[24] The Guardian, Home Office housing provider to make urgent repairs to asylum seeker flats, January 2022. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/11/home-office-housing-provider-to-make-urgent-repairs-to-asylum-seeker-flats>

[25] Mears Group, Annual Report and Accounts, 2022. Available at: Mears Group PLC Annual Report and Accounts 2022 | Mears Group PLC: <https://www.mearsgroup.co.uk/financial-reports/mears-group-plc-annual-report-and-accounts-2022>



“
People seeking asylum endure appalling conditions: families squeezed into single rooms, disabled people left without access to basic support, children losing weight due to poor nutrition.

Life Inside the Hotels

Hotel accommodation has become the defining feature of the UK's asylum system, with thousands of people forced to live in cramped, unsafe, and inadequate conditions for months or even years at a time. What the government presents as a temporary measure has, in reality, become a system of indefinite limbo, where people who came to the UK seeking safety are instead subjected to humiliation, neglect, and danger.

RAMFEL has collected detailed evidence from people seeking asylum, medical professionals, and our caseworkers, to document the reality of life inside these hotels.

Between 1 January 2023 and 11 February 2025, we worked with over 493 people, many of whom were children, housed in hotels, supporting them with matters relating to destitution, general support, and legal advice/representation.

In 2023, RAMFEL launched a questionnaire exploring asylum seekers' experiences in hotel accommodation (Annex 1). 49 people completed this questionnaire, some with the aid of an interpreter. In 2025, we continued

this evidence-gathering approach, combining insights from casework with follow up conversations with clients to build a fuller picture of daily life inside hotels. This allowed us to track recurring issues over time and capture the lived reality of those directly affected.

Our findings are reinforced by concerns raised by local authorities. One council reported evidence to us of widespread problems including poor food standards, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, safeguarding concerns, and minors being housed in unsuitable accommodation.

Through this process, the main concerns identified in relation to asylum hotel accommodations have been systematically documented. Names and identifying details have been redacted or anonymised to protect our clients' confidentiality. The following are the issues people who are completed our questionnaire most frequently cited.

Overcrowding, Unsanitary Conditions, and Lack of Privacy

Families are routinely crammed into single hotel rooms, regardless of the number of children or the needs of those involved. Parents, teenagers, and infants are forced to share one space in which they must sleep, eat, study, and attempt to live their lives. Rooms often contain little more than a couple of beds, meaning that children sometimes sleep on the floor or share with parents.

There is no privacy, no space for children to play or do homework, and no dignity.

“

The space was just enough for the beds. There was a small table but not enough space for everyone. So, if someone was eating, the other person had to stand up.”

Nearly half of the people who responded to our questionnaire (49%) said their room was overcrowded, with many explaining that whole families of up to six were forced to live together in a single space.

49% of people said their room was overcrowded

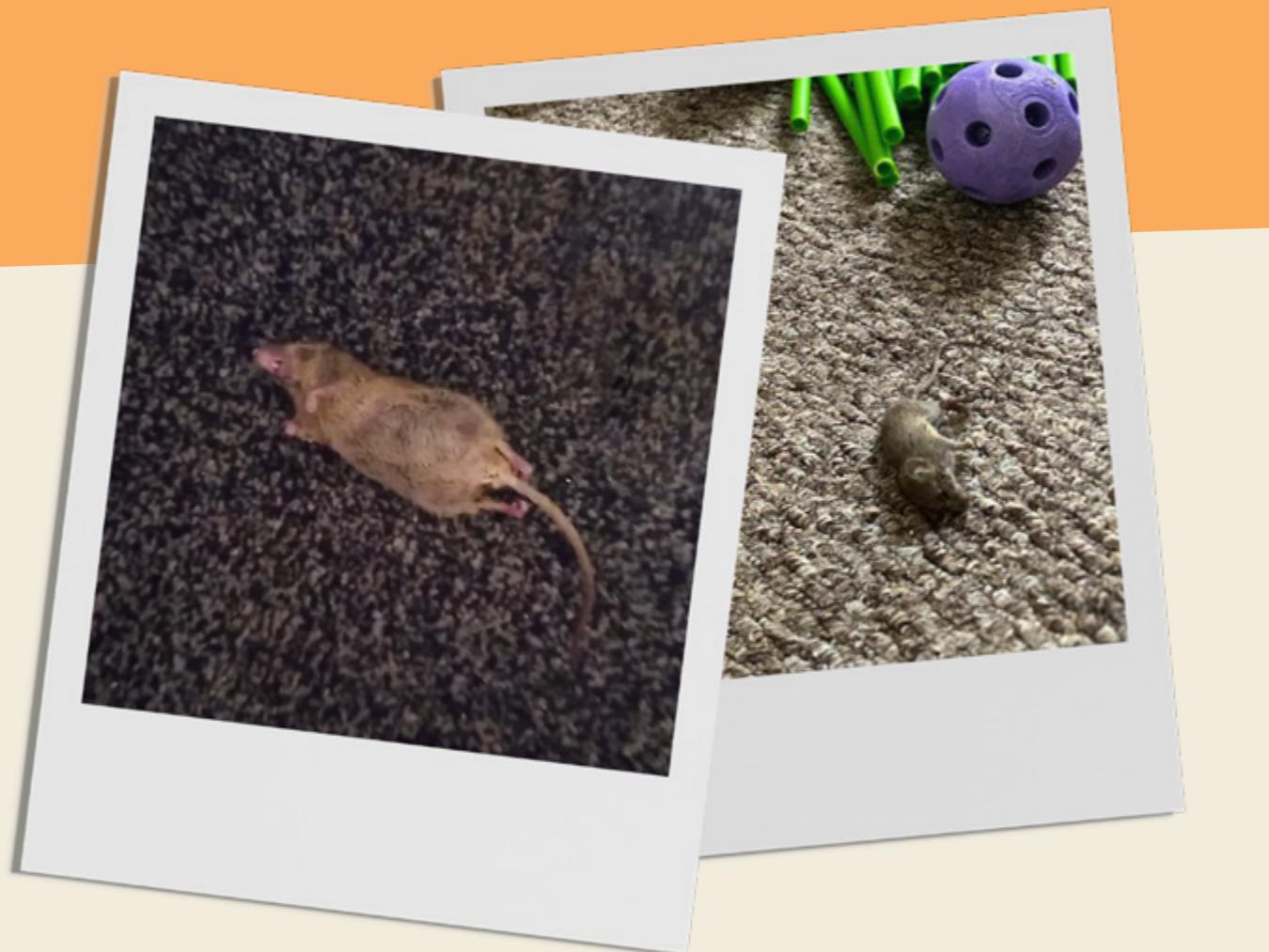
Case Study: Eren

Eren and her son were in a room with mould but the windows were locked and could not be opened, as per hotel management directions, so the space did not receive proper ventilation and was 'very suffocating'. It also meant that it was very hot during summer and the family struggled to sleep. The family had already spent around 18 months in a hotel at this point.

Case Study: Aisha

Aisha, described the suffocating conditions she endured with her two teenage children. The three of them were placed in a single room where beds doubled as desks and dining tables. Her daughter, aged 16, recalling her time there, visibly recoiled during the interview. She became tense and withdrawn, describing the experience as one she tries not to think about because of the deep anxiety it provokes.

Windows are often locked, leaving families without ventilation in damp, mouldy rooms. RAMFEL clients reported rodent infestations, with one family seeing as many as five rats in their room at once.



Poor Diet and Malnutrition

The food provided in hotel accommodation is widely described as inedible and unsafe. Parents told us meals were often burnt, undercooked, or still frozen in the middle, while others said the food was so heavily spiced it made them sick. In our questionnaire, 80% said the food was "really bad." 25% of people specifically raised that the food was far too spicy for their children, yet no alternatives were made available.

As a result, parents often try to feed their children with cereal, fruit, or snacks bought with their meagre allowance of just over £9 per week - an impossible task when feeding growing children.

80% of people said the food was "really bad."

“ I have a nine-month-old baby who is not given food any different from anyone else. I do not know how you can expect a nine-month-old baby to eat food that is this spicy.”



Local authorities have raised the alarm too, making clear that these are not just complaints from residents. One council reported: "We have logged various complaints of poor food provision, particularly in one hotel. We have cases of vulnerable residents including pregnant women and infants whose health is being impacted by lack of adequate food (e.g. not gaining weight during pregnancy, children being referred to paediatrics)."

In 2024 there were 463 complaints specifically about the meals provided in hotels.

Case Study: Musa

Musa, a 13-month-old baby was documented by a GP as losing weight because the hotel food was 'not suitable for his age and not meeting his daily nutritional requirements'. The GP described the situation as 'dangerous for the child's development'. Despite this clear medical evidence, the family's requests to be moved from the hotel went unanswered for months.

The above 13 months old boy is currently registered with the surgery. He arrived in UK with his mum about 6 months ago as an asylum seeker. I saw him in the clinic with his mum who informed that he is not receiving adequate nutritious food at their current accommodation in Ibis hotel, where they are currently placed. The food provided by the hotel is not appropriate for his age and doesn't meet his daily requirement. As a result he is suffering from constipation and stomach pain, and mum is worried about weight loss. I shall be grateful if you could kindly consider moving them to a more suitable accommodation where he shall be able to get good nutritious diet which shall help avoiding any long term complications in future. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need more information.

[26] The Guardian, Asylum seekers report widespread abuse in Home Office accommodation, June 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/03/asylum-seekers-report-widespread-abuse-in-home-office-accommodation>

Case Study: Daniel

Daniel, a father living with diabetes, was repeatedly served food that was wholly unsuitable for his condition. Meals laden with sugar and fat were the only options available. Over time, his health deteriorated: he began experiencing nerve pain and changes to his vision, symptoms that his GP explicitly linked to the poor diet provided in the hotel. Again, despite professional warnings, no adjustments were made to meet his basic medical needs.

diabetes. He has been housed in a hotel for the past 7 months, this has had a significant negative effect on his diabetes. Despite asking for a special diet for him, the food provided is still causing his diabetes to deteriorate. His wife is unable to cook for him as she did before they ended up in the hotel.

He is having signs for nerve and vision damage now. This is very serious as complications of diabetes can lead to going blind and losing limbs.

He needs to be provided with housing which allows himself or his wife to prepare his meals.

Neglect of Vulnerable People

The hotels are entirely unequipped to support people with additional needs. In our questionnaire, 34% reported having a medical condition or disability, yet none of them received the adjustments they needed. Pregnant women were denied access to adequate nutrition, new mothers were left without fridges to store breast milk, and survivors of torture or people with serious mental health conditions were

placed in shared rooms with strangers - compounding their trauma rather than alleviating it.

34% people reported having a medical condition or disability, yet none received the adjustments they needed

“ He received a close range gunshot wound in Syria. He is unable to manage his wound care in the current accommodation, he needs a clean place (...) he has no place to wash his clothes which are stained with discharging wound... this patient need urgent help to find a more suitable accommodation”

Case Study: Joshua

Joshua is paralysed from the waist down and reliant on a catheter. He depended on his cousin, who was also seeking asylum, and acted as his full-time carer, for day-to-day support. Yet when he was placed in hotel accommodation, the government refused to house his cousin with him. Joshua was left unable to care for himself, trapped in a room that was entirely unsuited to his needs. As a result, his catheter could not be changed regularly. It should be changed every few days, but he was unable to do this alone and the GP was unable to assist. This caused him significant physical discomfort, increased his risk of serious infections, and exacerbated his existing health vulnerabilities. It was only after prolonged legal battle that the government finally relented and allowed for his cousin to move into the accommodation.

Case Study: Selena

Selena, a young autistic girl, struggled desperately in the chaotic environment of a busy hotel. The constant noise and lack of space triggered her to harm herself. Her mother, overwhelmed and unsupported, watched her daughter's distress worsen by the day. A GP wrote candidly that her "behavioural difficulties has been made worse by her being surrounded by many non-family members" and recommended an urgent move. The government ignored this.

The family of Miss ██████████, have requested a supporting letter in order to assist them in getting a more appropriate accommodation. Miss ██████████ has health challenges including Learning and behavioural difficulties which has been made worse by her being surrounded by many non-family members. She reacts to this lack of privacy by physically hitting family members and also attempting to hit non-family members who come too close. Family are struggling to keep her behaviour contained in view of the current accommodation in a hotel.

In view of the above challenges, she and family would benefit from having an accommodation that provides their own private space where they would not constantly be in contact with non-family members and thereby reduce her behavioural difficulties.

Your assistance in supporting the family in this regard would be appreciated.

Case Study: Hawa

A GP wrote a supporting letter for, Hawa, a mother who was 26 weeks pregnant and living with her children in a hotel. The letter stated: "this lady is currently seeking asylum, has been staying in hotel for nearly a year, she is approx. 26 weeks pregnant. She tells me the place is not fit for staying in, food is poor and not nutritious, and the windows do not open so she cannot get fresh air. Is there any chance she can be moved into more suitable accommodation?"

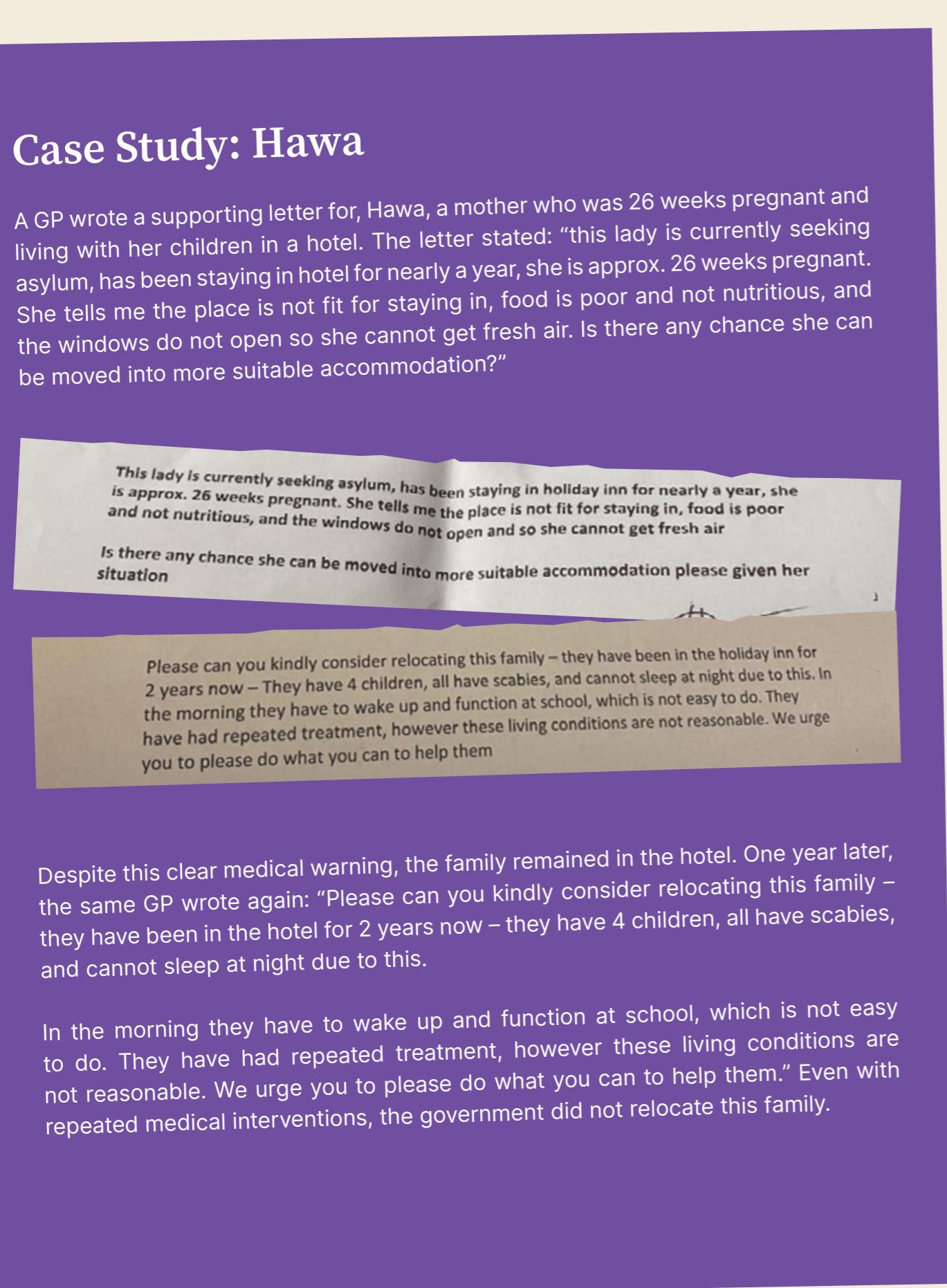
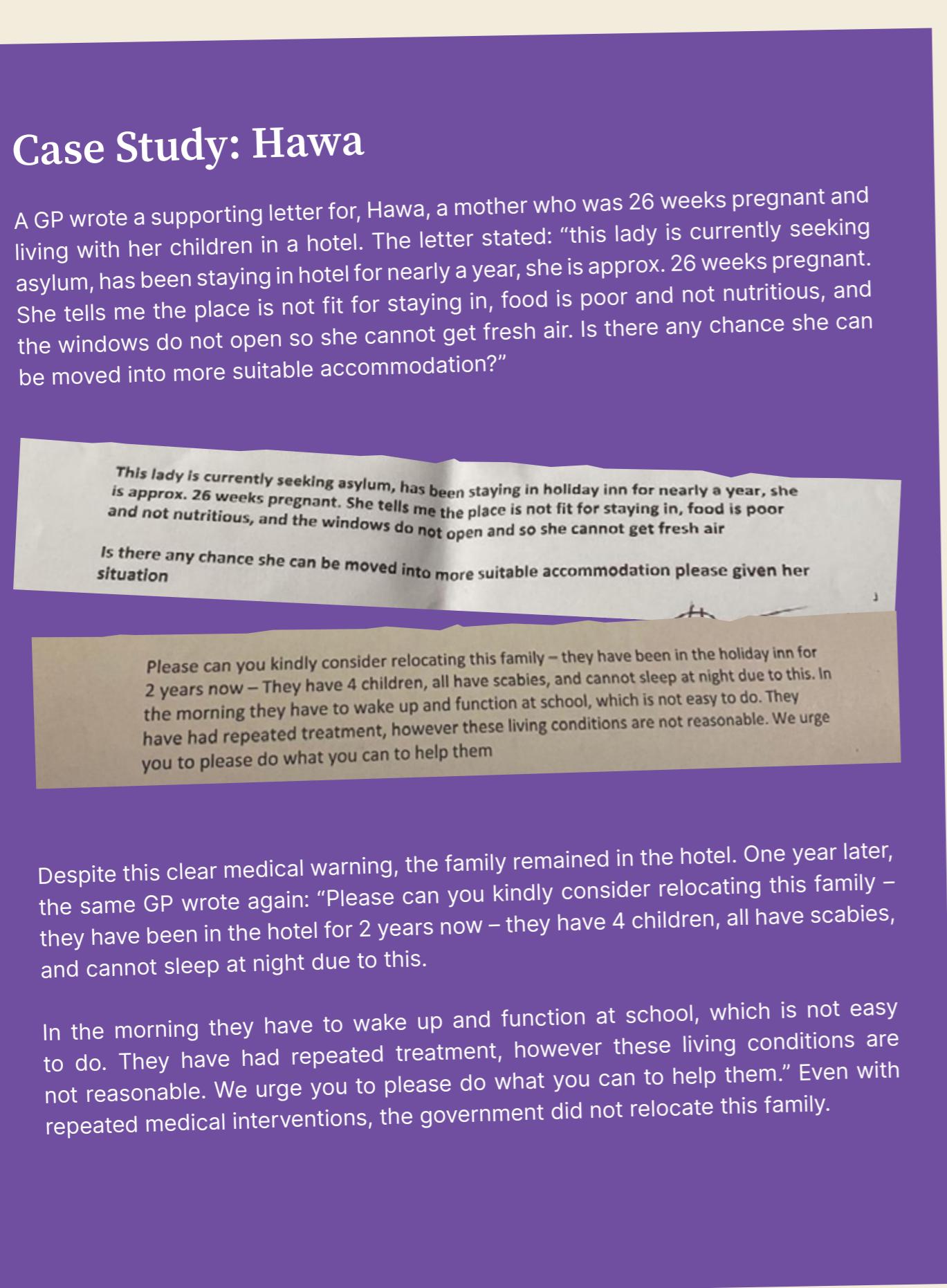
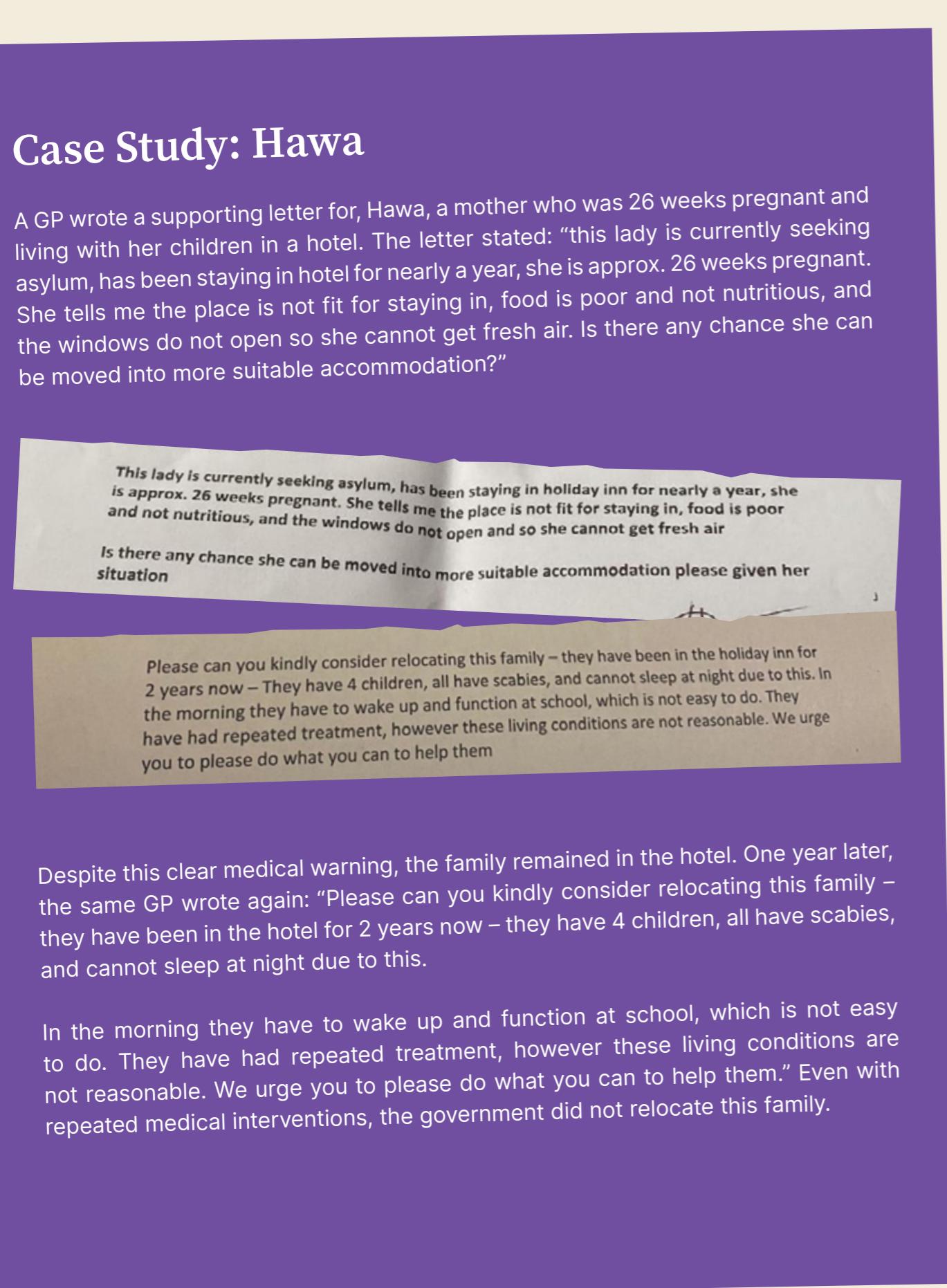
This lady is currently seeking asylum, has been staying in holiday inn for nearly a year, she is approx. 26 weeks pregnant. She tells me the place is not fit for staying in, food is poor and not nutritious, and the windows do not open and so she cannot get fresh air

Is there any chance she can be moved into more suitable accommodation please given her situation

Please can you kindly consider relocating this family – they have been in the holiday inn for 2 years now – They have 4 children, all have scabies, and cannot sleep at night due to this. In the morning they have to wake up and function at school, which is not easy to do. They have had repeated treatment, however these living conditions are not reasonable. We urge you to please do what you can to help them

Despite this clear medical warning, the family remained in the hotel. One year later, the same GP wrote again: "Please can you kindly consider relocating this family – they have been in the hotel for 2 years now – they have 4 children, all have scabies, and cannot sleep at night due to this."

In the morning they have to wake up and function at school, which is not easy to do. They have had repeated treatment, however these living conditions are not reasonable. We urge you to please do what you can to help them." Even with repeated medical interventions, the government did not relocate this family.



Children and Education

Children bear the heaviest burden of hotel life. Many spend months without access to education because nearby schools are oversubscribed or too far away. Some children walk more than an hour each way to school because their families cannot afford the bus fare. Without a stable home or space to play or study, children fall behind not only academically but emotionally and socially.

Even when children are in school, the absence of a stable home undermines their learning. Our questionnaire revealed 26% of parents had no space for their child to play or do homework. Families described cramped rooms with no desks or tables, where beds doubled as dining areas and study spaces. Parents told us that restrictions on basic household items like irons left children embarrassed to attend school in wrinkled uniforms, adding shame to an already difficult situation.

26% of parents had no space for their child to play or do homework

The effects are not only academic. Without safe spaces to play, socialise, or develop routines, children lose vital opportunities for growth and confidence. Instead, they are left isolated, anxious, and falling behind both educationally and emotionally.

These stories are not isolated. They are part of a wider pattern confirmed by independent research, including a 2025 report by the Public Law Project and Together with Migrant Children[27], which found that children in asylum accommodation face systematic barriers to education. The evidence is clear: hotel life is robbing children of their futures.

“ There is no desk or table in the room. He doesn't have school bags. I cannot provide anything for him. I can't even send him to school with a tidy and clean uniform as we are not allowed to keep irons in the room. So we cannot iron our clothing. I am so ashamed.

Safety, Violence, and Abuse

“ Women housed at hotels, including single mothers with young children, frequently voice concerns and complaints about male staff entering their rooms at any hour — sometimes without knocking, sometimes while they were asleep or not dressed. They felt uncomfortable and really unsafe.”

– RAMFEL caseworker

Hotels are inappropriate placements for vulnerable people. Families with young children and lone women are routinely forced to share cramped living quarters with strangers, creating a situation that is neither safe nor dignified. Residents regularly report harassment, intimidation, and intrusion of privacy from hotel staff. Data obtained from a freedom of information request revealed that there were 428 complaints in 2024 about staff behaviour[28], underlining that these are not isolated experiences from our clients but part of a systemic failure.

Staff are not trained in safeguarding and residents know that complaints are rarely acted upon. Many are too afraid to raise concerns, fearing they will be punished by being moved far away from their support networks or, worse, that their asylum claim could be affected.

75% had raised concerns, but in 76% of these cases, nothing changed

[28] The Guardian, Asylum seekers report widespread abuse in Home Accommodation, June 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/03/asylum-seekers-report-widespread-abuse-in-home-office-accommodation>

Complaints

Complaints in asylum accommodation are frequent, yet resolving the problems experienced in hotels remains a significant challenge. Our questionnaire found that 75% had raised concerns, whether to Migrant Help, the Home Office, or directly with hotel staff. Yet in 76% of these cases, nothing changed. Residents described reporting issues repeatedly about food, safety, overcrowding, or health needs; only to be ignored or brushed aside.

The complaints system places a heavy burden on residents to address issues directly with hotel staff, who are often ill-equipped to respond appropriately.

Staff responses can range from dismissive to threatening, and they frequently lack the training necessary to identify safeguarding concerns.

Fear of repercussions further discourages people from pursuing complaints; people expressed fear about making complaints or even accessing their right to legal advice, concerned that doing so could negatively affect their asylum claim. This highlights a significant barrier to raising concerns and seeking redress, contributing to a climate in which issues remain unaddressed.

“ Complaining about hotel conditions is terrifying when it feels like everything they've worked so hard to build could be at risk.”

– RAMFEL caseworker

Case Study: Ariana

Ariana's family applied to leave their hotel accommodation based on medical grounds. However, despite the government accepting the request, the family was not moved to dispersal accommodation. The family remained at the hotel for 8 more months, despite our continuous chasing and escalating. We therefore considered the possibility of referring to a public law solicitor to challenge the delay. Ariana was reluctant about pursuing this for fear that this would "create problems" for them.

A major systemic problem is the constant abdication of responsibility. Hotel staff refer issues to the Home Office, the Home Office to Migrant Help, and Migrant Help simply forwards communications back to the Home Office, creating a loop that rarely resolves the underlying problem and where everyone assigns responsibility elsewhere.

Successful resolution often depends on specialist charities or legal support, particularly for dispersal requests, which are evaluated largely on medical

grounds. Gathering the necessary medical evidence to demonstrate that conditions are worsened by hotel accommodation is both complex and costly, placing an undue burden on clients who often have extremely limited resources.

This convoluted complaints process leaves vulnerable people without adequate support and highlights the urgent need for clearer, more accountable mechanisms for addressing accommodation-related issues.



Public Resistance

Misinformation and hostile political messaging have fuelled negative public attitudes toward people seeking asylum, leading to harassment, protests, and even violence. Though hotel use expanded exponentially under the previous Conservative government, since assuming office Labour have failed to improve things, though they have committed to end hotel use by 2029.

In the summer of 2024, racists targeted hotels and organisations supporting people seeking asylum. In response to this, RAMFEL launched a petition calling for an end to the use of hotels for asylum accommodation. In January 2025, we hand-delivered this petition to No. 10 Downing Street and then Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, with over 550 members of the public signing in support[29].

The petition made a clear demand: the current system is failing people seeking asylum, and the use of hotels needs to end. The government's response was dismissive and vague. (Annex 2)

It stated:

"The Home Office is committed to ensuring that destitute asylum seekers are housed in safe, secure and suitable accommodation, and that they are treated with dignity while their asylum claim is considered."

This claim is clearly contradicted by the experiences of our clients, who report overcrowding, malnutrition, and months or years trapped in unsuitable hotel conditions. The government also stated:

"The Home Office is committed to ending the use of hotels over time, as part of the Government's wider commitment to cut the costs of the asylum system and to provide value for money for the taxpayer."

Yet costs have not reduced. In fact, the accommodation bill continues to spiral, with billions funnelled into failing private contracts rather than sustainable housing solutions.



[29] RAMFEL, Ending hotel accommodation for asylum seekers, January 2025. Available at: A Step Closer: Ending Hotel Accommodation for Asylum Seekers - RAMFEL

Labour should be taking positive steps to improve the asylum system, such as giving asylum seekers the right to work so they can support themselves and offering adequate community-based accommodation. Such steps would allow people seeking asylum to far more readily start developing ties with their local communities, improving social cohesion and in turn reducing the gargantuan accommodation bill.

Instead, Labour are repeating the same mistakes as the Conservatives, fuelling racist grievances and resentment towards asylum seekers, who have no desire to remain in awful hotel accommodation for months and years on end. Tellingly, no senior politicians – be they Labour, Conservative or Reform – have directed anger or ire towards the billionaires profiting off the dysfunction of the asylum accommodation system. This speaks volumes.

Instead of taking constructive steps to improve the asylum system, such as granting asylum seekers the right to work and providing adequate accommodation, the government has continued to fuel division. The ongoing practice of placing asylum seekers in temporary hotel accommodation, sometimes for years at a time, exacerbates this problem, leaving them unable to work, fuelling mistrust and undermining social cohesion. It is a toxic mix, with many political figures only too happy to exploit this dysfunction and fuel local grievances.

The cycle of violence repeated itself in summer 2025.

[30] Together with Refugees, More than 200 organisations sign open letter in response to anti-refugee protests, August 2025.
Available at: Press release: More than 200 organisations sign open letter in response to anti-refugee protests - Together With Refugees

Once again, far-right groups targeted asylum hotels, showing how politicians and the media continue to whip up anti-migrant hatred. Politicians, predictably, went out of their way to describe these people as having so-called legitimate grievances; as if targeting people who have fled war and persecution, instead of billionaires profiting off the asylum system, was a case of righteous anger.

In response, RAMFEL joined more than 200 other organisations – including Amnesty International UK, Refugee Action, Women for Refugee Women, and the Scottish Refugee Council – in signing an open letter to party leaders[30]. Coordinated by Together With Refugees, the letter condemned the violent protests and exposed how the government's failed asylum policies fuel division.

Continued reliance on for-profit companies to provide accommodation perpetuates a system that prioritises profit over people. The billions of pounds currently spent on failing contracts should instead fund local authorities to provide safe, dignified housing and strengthen public services for everyone.

Short-term fixes are no longer sufficient. People seeking asylum deserve safe, dignified housing, not a cycle of failed providers and broken promises. The government must commit to delivering real solutions that protect refugees and uphold human dignity.



Conclusion and Recommendations:

The voices captured in our questionnaire paint a stark picture of what life in asylum hotels really means. Families of up to six people crammed into one room, parents unable to feed their children because the food is unsafe or inedible, and children falling behind at school because they lack even a desk to do their homework.

People living with medical conditions or disabilities are routinely ignored, while those who try to raise complaints are met with silence or indifference, trapped in a profit-driven accountability vortex. One mother described her deep shame at being unable to send her son to school in a clean uniform, saying she "cannot provide anything for him" in the hotel environment. These accounts remind us that behind every statistic is a person who came to this country seeking safety, only to be met with neglect and indignity.

Anything less is a betrayal of the values we claim to uphold.

The evidence is overwhelming. Hotel accommodation is not a "temporary solution" but an entrenched part of the asylum process that leaves families trapped in unsafe and degrading conditions. Whilst this system fails the people housed in these deplorable conditions for years on end, vast sums of public money are funnelled into the hands of private contractors.

Asylum seekers deserve safe, dignified housing, the chance to rebuild their lives, and the opportunity to contribute to society. The government must stop relying on for-profit companies to provide accommodation and instead properly fund and support local authorities to house people within our communities. The billions currently wasted on hotel contracts should be redirected towards protecting refugees and strengthening public services for everyone.

The solutions are clear and achievable:

1 End long-term hotel use

Move away from the prolonged and inappropriate use of hotels as asylum accommodation. This system was designed for short-term emergencies but has become the default, trapping people in conditions that harm their wellbeing, erode public trust and damage social cohesion.

3 Invest in community housing

Redirect public funds into long-term, community-based accommodation that allows people to live independently and establish themselves locally. This will reduce isolation, promote cohesion, and ensure public money strengthens communities rather than lining corporate pockets.

5 Build an asylum system based on dignity and integration

The government must end its reliance on private contractors and bring asylum accommodation provision back under public control. This would restore accountability, reduce perverse profit incentives, and ensure that decisions about people's lives are made with compassion and are in the public interest—not corporate gain.

2 Set and enforce national minimum standards

In the immediate term, the government must introduce and enforce clear, legally binding national standards for all asylum accommodation. These must recognise and respond to the specific needs of children, families, and vulnerable people, ensuring access to nutritious food, adequate space, and safeguarding protections. A transparent inspection and monitoring process is essential to ensure that no one falls through the cracks.

4 Give people the right to work

Allowing people seeking asylum to work is both practical and popular, with 81% of the public supporting the policy change. It enables self-sufficiency, improves mental health, and reduces the financial pressure on the state while helping local economies and employers facing labour shortages.

In the meantime, any politician claiming that people housed in these places are living their best life should either read this report or, even better, volunteer to spend a few nights in one.

Annex

Annex 1

RAMFEL Questionnaire 2023 – Suitability of Hotel Accommodation

BLANK Questionnaire

1. What's your name?
2. Were / are you living in a hotel where food was provided?
3. If yes, what hotel was it and how long have you lived there?
4. Please describe how the food was / is served to you?
5. If it was in packaging, do you have any photos that you would be able to send to RAMFEL?
6. Do you have any medical conditions or disabilities, and did the Hotel or the Home Office make any adjustments as a result of this?
7. Please describe the living conditions in the hotel: Was / is the hotel clean and hygienic? Was / is there enough space for you / your family? Do / did you feel safe in the accommodation?
8. Do you have any additional information to provide about the quality of food in hotels or about the suitability of the accommodation?
9. Are you able to provide any other evidence to support what you have said in response to the previous questions?

Annex 2



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DECS Reference: TRO/1264361/25

13 February 2025

Dear Ms Hussain,

Thank you for your correspondence of 23 January 2025 to the Home Secretary on behalf of the Refugee and Migrant Forum of Essex and London. You have outlined your concerns regarding the use of contingency accommodation, hotels, to house asylum seekers. Your correspondence has been passed to asylum support at the Home Office for a response.

The asylum accommodation estate is under huge pressure. This has necessitated the use of contingency accommodation, such as hotels, to accommodate asylum seekers to ensure the Home Office continues to meet its statutory obligations to accommodate asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute.

As you will appreciate for the safety, security and wellbeing of those we accommodate and staff, we do not disclose information about specific hotels which may or may not be utilised by the Home Office to the general public.

The Home Office is committed to ensuring that destitute asylum seekers are housed in safe, secure and suitable accommodation, and that they are treated with dignity while their asylum claim is considered.

The safety, health and wellbeing of asylum seekers is of paramount importance. All accommodation must meet the high contractual standards and be safe, fit for purpose and properly equipped. The Asylum Accommodation and Support Contract Requirements below gives a detailed breakdown of all of the services to be undertaken by our accommodation providers and to the standards we expect. Full details of this can be found here:

http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-1112/AASC_-_Schedule_2_-_Statement_of_Requirements.pdf

All asylum seekers have access to a 24/7 AIRE (Advice, Issue Reporting and Eligibility) service provided for the Home Office by Migrant Help where they can raise any concerns

regarding accommodation or support services, and they can get information about how to obtain further support. Migrant Help are available via webchat or email, and there are service level agreements in place to resolving contacts, dependent on issue type. In addition to the provision of Advice and Guidance services, Migrant Help's role includes acting as the main contact point for all asylum seeker complaints, reports of issues and requests for assistance.

The Home Office is committed to ending the use of hotels over time, as part of the Government's wider commitment to cut the costs of the asylum system and to provide value for money for the taxpayer. The use of hotels as a long-term solution for accommodating destitute asylum seekers is not acceptable but this situation is not something we can fix overnight, and I appreciate your patience and understanding while we work to end this practice.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write to the Home Office.

Yours sincerely,

G Preston

Asylum Support, Business Delivery Unit
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