

# a brief overview of the UK border regime...

## ALIENS ACT 1905

From 1824 to 1905, Britain had an open-door immigration policy. Prior to that, there was the Aliens Act 1793 - a temporary wartime response to fear of 'French spies' - and the Edict of Expulsion in 1290, a royal decree expelling Jews from England, which was only overturned in 1657. The Aliens Act of 1905, then, introduced the first modern immigration controls in Britain. Although ostensibly designed to exclude criminals and the poor, much of the rhetoric consisted of dog-whistle anti-Semitism, and a central objective was to restrict the entry of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe. In the labour movement, Jewish people stealing jobs and 'undercutting wages', as well as demanding the state's resources, were cited as justifications for such controls—not dissimilar from today's tabloid scapegoating of migrants.

## DETENTION CENTRES

Immigration detention facilities were introduced in the late-60s, with purpose-built immigration removal centres (IRCs) introduced in the 90s. Currently, the government has power to detain anyone at any point of their immigration process, indefinitely. Most detainees are those whose asylum claims are being investigated or those who are awaiting removal. Increasingly, detainees are kept for prolonged periods of time, likely due not only to increased migration but also to a prevailing view that many asylum claims are 'bogus'. The imprisonment of migrants often only compounds mental health issues for vulnerable people, and between 1989 and 2017, there were 34 deaths in immigration detention. Detainees must often work as cleaners, cooks, and gardeners - roles essential to the running of IRCs - for as little as £1 per hour, amassing huge profits for private companies like Serco, G4S, Mitie and GEO, who hold highly lucrative contracts with the Home Office to manage IRCs. Between 2013 and 2017, the government spent £523.5 million detaining people, plus £16 million in damages due to unlawful detention.

## CHARTER FLIGHTS

The Home Office began using chartered deportations in 2001. This means booking out a whole plane for the purposes of mass deportation, which can cost £5,000 per person deported. Charter flights can be violent, with people sometimes being restrained by their heads, waists and wrists. Many people are also deported on standard scheduled flights, leaving 'voluntarily' or with a guard of 'escorts'. Despite being commercial flights, these deportations can also be violent. In 2010, Jimmy Mubenga was killed on a British Airways flight by three G4S guards (a security company contracted by the Home Office).

## IMMIGRATION RAIDS

The Home Office undertake about 600 workplace raids per year, usually based on uncorroborated tip-offs from the public, employers reporting on workers, and Immigration Officers acting without legal warrant. The main pressure for employers to co-operate is not legal but financial – businesses are liable for penalties of £20,000 per undocumented worker. Immigration Officials also regularly fail to act with the required consent of those they question.

## BARRIERS TO STATUS

Applying to regularise one's status is often prohibitively expensive, with citizenship application fees exceeding £1,000 and settlement application fees ranging from £1,500 to £3,000 – far more than they cost to process. To apply for a spousal visa, you and your partner must prove that you earn £18,600 per year, plus an additional £3,800 for one child, and then £2,400 for each additional child.

## COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRATION

The British Nationality Act of 1948 granted British citizenship to members of Commonwealth states. Migration from former British colonies was encouraged in the post-war period to fill labour shortages in Britain, particularly in public services. This did not happen without a backlash, and a series of successive Commonwealth Immigration Acts severely restricted rights of entry to Commonwealth citizens. These restrictions were heavily racialised, e.g. through their maintenance of right of entry to 'patrials'—those who were born, adopted, or naturalised in the UK and those who could provide some evidence that a parent or grandparent had been born, adopted or naturalised in the UK.

## HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

In 2012, Theresa May introduced an approach to immigration control that aimed to create "a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants". The 'hostile environment policy' names the set of immigration policies that have this aim in mind. Such policies require schools, universities, the NHS, banks, landlords, charities, and other services to carry out ID checks and pass on personal information to the Home Office, turning public services into border police. This makes undocumented people vulnerable to exploitation and threatens their basic safety. It also targets documented people of colour, who in virtue of their racialisation are more likely to be suspected to be undocumented.

## WINDRUSH SCANDAL

The Windrush scandal concerns Black British people who were wrongly detained, denied legal rights, deported or threatened with deportation by the Home Office. Many of those affected were part of the 'Windrush generation' and had arrived in the UK as British subjects. As well as those who were wrongly deported or detained, many lost their jobs or homes, or were denied benefits or medical care to which they were entitled. A number of long-term UK residents were wrongly refused re-entry to the UK. This was thought to be the direct result of the government's hostile environment policies.

# ...and how to resist it!

A non-exhaustive list of groups that are fighting to resist various aspects of the UK's border regime.

## SOAS DETAINEE SUPPORT

SOAS Detainee Support (SDS) are a group that attempts to break the isolation of immigration detention, and supports people to take control of their cases and resist their imprisonment and deportation. Central to the group is visiting people who are being held in Immigration Removal Centres and in London prisons under immigration powers. SDS work in solidarity rather than charity, and try to meet people in detention on their own terms and without preconceived notions about their situation or desires.

## ANTI-RAIDS NETWORK

The Anti-Raids Network are a loose network of autonomous groups and individuals working to build the resistance to immigration raids since 2012 by producing and sharing information and materials. Groups organising under the Anti-Raids banner, such as Haringey Anti-Raids, run workshops on how to resist immigration raids, and understanding our rights.

## DOCS NOT COPS

Docs not Cops are a group of people based in London, with groups also in Brighton and Birmingham, who believe that health care is a human right and that no one should be afraid to go to the doctor, either because they can't pay or might be punished. They are doctors, nurses, HIV activists, students, teachers, and laypeople, who together want to fight xenophobia and the dismantling of the NHS.

## LESBIANS & GAYS SUPPORT THE MIGRANTS

Inspired by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in the 1980s, Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants is a queer group that stands in solidarity with other communities facing state violence and media attacks. In the current political climate, migrants bear the brunt of far-right violence, face demonisation in the media and are criminalised by the state. LGS Migrants use the strength of the queer community and an understanding of its history of struggle to fight back in support of those at the sharpest end of government oppression today.



## AGAINST BORDERS FOR CHILDREN

Against Borders for Children is a coalition of parents, teachers, schools and campaigners, whose aim is to reverse the Department of Education's policy, effective from September 2016, to collect country of birth and nationality information on 8 million children in England in order to 'create a hostile environment' for migrant children in schools.

## NELMA

NELMA brings together activists from across London to campaign on issues faced by migrants in vulnerable positions in their communities. They challenge injustices towards families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and we coordinated a campaign against the Home Office's former policy of detaining and deporting EEA national rough sleepers.

## UNIS RESIST BORDER CONTROLS

Unis Resist Border Controls are a collective of British, EU, non-EU, migrant students, lecturers, & university workers opposed to UKVI surveillance & the hostile environment on UK campuses.

## MORE ORGANISATIONS

END DEPORTATIONS  
MIGRANTS RIGHTS NETWORK  
BAIL FOR IMMIGRATION DETAINEES  
DETAINED VOICES