

Greater Manchester Asylum Hotels Group: Our response to the protests outside hotels

We are a group of people who have come to the UK to seek safety and have spent time living in asylum hotels while we are waiting for a decision on our asylum claim.

We want to communicate with people in our new communities because we are aware that some people in the UK are not happy about there being asylum hotels in their area. The protests outside hotels make us feel unsafe – but we also know that the protesters do not speak for everyone in Britain.

That's why we believe it is time for people to hear our side of the story.

We are grateful that we are housed, and we do not want to complain.

But we need to share information about what life in hotels is really like because we know that there is a lot of misinformation about asylum hotels in the media and on social media. We want to put this right so you don't misunderstand the situation.

We also understand that people have concerns about safety and cost, and we want to address those – because we believe that we share similar values.

Why we came here

We have come to the UK to seek safety.

No one would choose to leave their country – we have been forced to leave because of war or persecution. You should know that everyone who arrived

in Britain to apply for asylum carries deep sadness inside and has been forced to risk their life.

When we arrived in the UK, the government put us in hotels and told us to wait while they make a decision about our asylum claim. On arriving, we feel grateful to be welcomed and to be put in a safe place in a free, democratic country. We appreciate that the people in the UK and the government have helped us after what we have been through in our countries. We tell ourselves that living in a hotel might be difficult, but it is only temporary.

Cost

We understand that people have concerns about the cost of asylum hotels to taxpayers.

We live on **£9.95** per week. We know that the company that runs asylum hotels in the North West, Serco, is making big profits and not spending the money on us.

We do not want to be dependent on the British government for support. We want to work and contribute. But the government does not allow us to work.

What life in hotels is like

Looking at asylum hotels, you may think it's a life of luxury. You may think that it's like a holiday. But living inside them for a long time is very hard.

It feels like you are on your own, you feel confined, you feel separate from what's going on outside.

For many, their only friend is their phone. Many face language barriers – then no one can even hear what is killing you inside. Those of us who don't speak English want to learn – but we face barriers accessing English classes.

We have no choice what to eat, and we are not allowed to cook for ourselves or for our children. Often the food is unhealthy, and the same every day – fried food, fried food, every day the same. Or the same rice that looks like porridge, every day.

After fried chips and rice every day for ten months, a child will feel sick whenever he passes the kitchen.

Imagine how it feels to become institutionalised by months of living in a hotel.

No space or privacy

If we are here on our own, without families, we have to share rooms with strangers. We have no choice about this.

For those who have our families with us, we live all the time with our children in one room.

Often there are delays for our children to get into school.

For some of us, we feel like we are losing our children.



Staff and rules

The staff working for Serco, who manage the accommodation, do not know us as people – we are numbers to them. Often, they are rude or aggressive to us.

There are so many rules, it is confusing –

especially for people who don't yet speak English.

No choice

We understand that people weren't asked about having asylum hotels in their communities, and that they feel ignored.

We understand this may feel difficult. We also don't have any choice where the Home Office tell us to live. Now we are here, we want to be part of and contributing to your community.

No control

In summary, living in a hotel is not a life of luxury – it can feel like a prison.

We don't know what tomorrow will bring. We may stay in the hotel a very long time.

The Home Office can move us to a new location at any time. We have no choice where to go.

The future is very uncertain for us as we navigate the asylum process. Even if we are granted refugee status, we know that we will be kicked out of asylum accommodation and will probably become homeless.

What we have left behind

Coming to the UK, we have lost a lot of things in our past life. You should not judge us by our appearance – our inner selves hold mountains of worries and sadness.



Many of us have left families behind. When you see a 'single male' asylum hotel, remember that many of these men will have wives and children back home.

If we have left our families behind, it is because the journey is long and dangerous – our children might not survive.

Now the government has taken away our right to be reunited with our families.

We miss our families a lot. They are concerned about us and they think day and night about us.

Safety

We understand that some people living near asylum hotels are concerned about safety. We understand this because safety also matters to us – we came to the UK to be safe. Whether we are men or women, we have been through a lot of trauma in our lives.

We recognise that there have been isolated cases of people seeking asylum who commit crimes. We are as angry as you are at what they have done, and we believe they should face the force of the law. We also know that this is a tiny proportion of the number of people who commit crimes, and we say that you cannot judge a whole group because of what a very few people did wrong.

Our place in local communities

Having lost so much, we have to build everything from zero.

We are grateful for the welcome we have had from local communities – in churches, mosques, charities, libraries, community centres, ESOL classes. We have people who are looking out for us in difficult situations, and this helps us find a sense of belonging.

We respect the British values of openness

and tolerance that we have met here.

Now we are here, we are committed to integrating into British society and improving our English, and we believe that we have a lot to contribute – among our members in the GM Hotels Group we have worked in nursing, teaching, special educational needs, engineering, journalism, music, and more.

Unfortunately the government bans us from working while we are waiting for an asylum decision.

But we are doing what we can to volunteer in the community. Through this we have been able to build connections, we have learnt about British society, **we feel part of something.**

Once we get our papers, we want to work, pay taxes and we will bring value to the community.



In summary, we came to the UK because we had to seek safety. We are grateful to have that safety here.

We are hopeful that we will be able to rebuild our lives and give back to the communities that have welcomed us – and we hope to be part of a UK that will continue to be a place of fairness, tolerance and openness. We are not here to take – we are here to share.

Our dreams of a better tomorrow may be similar to yours. We hope you will see us not as strangers, but as new neighbours who want to live in peace and grow together with you.