# Home Office ignored British Red Cross warnings on ‘inhumane’ Manston and Dover asylum conditions



The recent revelations concerning the actions of the Home Office during a humanitarian crisis in UK immigration centres have raised profound questions regarding the government’s handling of asylum-seeker welfare. Newly released documents highlight how the Home Office ignored urgent warnings issued by the British Red Cross about the deteriorating conditions at the Manston centre in Kent and the Western Jet Foil processing site in Dover in the autumn of 2022. These documents were disclosed under Freedom of Information laws after a two-year wait.

In a series of emails and reports sent between September and November 2022, Red Cross staff documented troubling observations, including overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and the confiscation of essential medications. At the height of the crisis, the Manston centre, built for 1,600 individuals, was reportedly housing nearly 4,000 people by the end of October. This influx led to serious health hazards, including a confirmed death from diphtheria, further underscoring the urgency of the Red Cross’s warnings.

Conditions at both facilities deteriorated sharply, as Red Cross representatives found people confined to leaky tents, without proper bedding or sanitary facilities. Reports indicate that many asylum seekers were made to sleep on floors without adequate covers, enduring mouldy and damp conditions. Furthermore, access to medical care was severely restricted, with reports of migrants suffering from respiratory illnesses and skin conditions, showcasing the systemic failings of the facilities.

As the situation grew increasingly dire, pressure mounted from various quarters—including MPs, unions, and advocacy organisations—but the Home Office's response appeared to be sluggish. Red Cross staff attempted to escalate their concerns through official channels, including a whistleblowing email, only to receive a reply indicating that external correspondence would not be considered. The gravity of the situation forced the Red Cross to withdraw from the Western Jet Foil site after escalating safety concerns, particularly after an extremist attack on the facility.

The timeline of events coincided with the brief premiership of Liz Truss, during which significant shifts in the Home Office's leadership occurred. Suella Braverman, appointed as Home Secretary, was forced to resign briefly only to return shortly after. Despite these leadership changes, systemic issues persisted, highlighting the inadequacies and inefficiencies within the asylum system.

The British Red Cross has voiced that the serious problems observed at Manston and Western Jet Foil are reflective of a wider crisis within the UK’s asylum system, necessitating a comprehensive overhaul that addresses the fundamental rights and dignities of those seeking refuge. The organisation's UK director for refugee support, Alex Fraser, stressed the urgent need for better systems to manage and support asylum seekers, particularly as conditions at Manston and Western Jet Foil were described as "inhumane” by various reports.

As investigations into the Manston crisis continue, including a formal inquiry into events at the facility, public and political scrutiny remains high. Recent statements from the Home Office acknowledge the strain on resources and the pressing need for alternative accommodation, yet critics assert that meaningful change appears lacking. The ongoing struggles faced by the British Red Cross, such as having to redirect funds from its disaster relief budget to support asylum seekers, underscore the urgent need for systemic change within the UK's asylum and immigrant processing systems.

In light of these developments, the call for a more compassionate, effective, and dignified approach to the treatment of asylum seekers grows louder, as stakeholders urge the government to rectify the current failings that persistently endanger the wellbeing of the vulnerable populations it is mandated to protect.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 - source [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/manston-immigration-detention-dover-kent-small-boat-b2746599.html)
2. Paragraphs 4, 5, 7 - source [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jun/29/asylum-seekers-at-manston-may-have-been-treated-inhumanely-report-finds)
3. Paragraphs 1, 3, 5 - source [[3]](https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/press-releases/manston-processing-centre-statement)
4. Paragraph 5 - source [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-63262176)
5. Paragraph 4 - source [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/25/inside-story-of-manston-detention-centre)
6. Paragraph 4 - source [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-63262176)
7. Paragraph 7 - source [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/17/red-cross-had-to-take-220000-from-disaster-fund-to-clothe-asylum-seekers-in-uk)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/manston-immigration-detention-dover-kent-small-boat-b2746599.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jun/29/asylum-seekers-at-manston-may-have-been-treated-inhumanely-report-finds> - A report by the Council of Europe found that during late October and early November 2022, overcrowded conditions at the Manston short-term holding facility may have subjected many detainees to inhuman and degrading treatment. The report also highlighted the death of Hussein Haseeb Ahmed, a Kurdish man from Iraq, who contracted diphtheria and died on 19 November after being taken to hospital. The Council of Europe recommended reducing occupancy levels in the marquees used at Manston to avoid overcrowding.
3. <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/press-releases/manston-processing-centre-statement> - In November 2022, the British Red Cross expressed deep concern over the escalating humanitarian situation at the Manston processing centre. Alex Fraser, Director of Refugee Services, emphasized the need for immediate action to ensure the safety and well-being of migrants, stating that no one should experience overcrowded accommodation that puts them at risk of disease and unlawful detention. The Red Cross called for urgent measures to address the backlog of asylum decisions and provide safer routes for those fleeing conflict and persecution.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-63262176> - The Refugee Council described conditions at the Manston migrant centre as 'inhumane,' citing overcrowding, disease outbreaks, and children sleeping on floors. Approximately 3,000 migrants were being held at the facility, which was originally designed for 1,000 people. The Home Office acknowledged the strain on the asylum system due to increased small boat crossings and stated that alternative accommodation would be provided as soon as possible.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/25/inside-story-of-manston-detention-centre> - An investigative report provided an inside look at the Manston detention centre, revealing overcrowded conditions, inadequate facilities, and reports of staff misconduct. The facility, initially designed to hold 1,600 people, was housing over 4,000 migrants, many of whom were detained for longer than the legal 24-hour limit. The report highlighted the challenges faced by detainees and staff, including inadequate sleeping arrangements and insufficient access to basic necessities.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-63262176> - The Refugee Council described conditions at the Manston migrant centre as 'inhumane,' citing overcrowding, disease outbreaks, and children sleeping on floors. Approximately 3,000 migrants were being held at the facility, which was originally designed for 1,000 people. The Home Office acknowledged the strain on the asylum system due to increased small boat crossings and stated that alternative accommodation would be provided as soon as possible.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/mar/17/red-cross-had-to-take-220000-from-disaster-fund-to-clothe-asylum-seekers-in-uk> - The British Red Cross had to use £220,000 from its disaster fund to provide basic clothing for asylum seekers in the UK, an unprecedented intervention. The funds were used to help 12,000 people, some of whom had contracted scabies, highlighting the dire conditions at migrant processing centres like Manston. The Red Cross emphasized the need for systemic changes to address the challenges faced by asylum seekers and to ensure they are treated with dignity and respect.