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Asylum seekers to be housed by prison guards December 22, 2011

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The UK Border Agency has announced that its preferred bidders for asylum accommodation provision across the country for the next five years will be none but Serco, G4S and Reliance, the three multinational security companies that manage most immigration prisons and forcible deportations in the UK.

Each company was awarded two contracts covering two of the UK's six regions: Reliance won the contracts for Wales and London & the South; G4S was awarded the contract for the Midlands & East England and North East Yorkshire & Humber; while Serco was awarded two contracts for North West and Scotland & Northern Ireland.

Reliance manages police custody facilities and [took over detainee escort services](#) from G4S earlier this year. G4S runs three detention centres and is [accused of abusing and killing of detainees](#). Serco runs two detention centres in the UK and seven detention centres in Australia, and has been at the centre of ongoing [fiascos and inquiries](#) in both countries.

Refugee support groups fear that asylum seekers housed by G4S, Serco and Reliance will be subject to further abuse and negligence, given the companies' infamous track records (see, for example, [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). They also add that there are potential conflicts of interest if the same companies are detaining and housing asylum seekers.

Old and new contracts

In April 2006, the Home Office awarded nine companies five-year contracts to provide temporary accommodation for around 35,000 asylum seekers on behalf of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). These included the Angel Group, Clearsprings, Priority Properties, United Property Management and other new companies. According to information obtained by Corporate Watch in 2009 under the Freedom of Information Act, the total estimated value of the contracts, which were due to expire in 2011, was nearly £900 million, or £170 million per year.

Despite providing sub-standard and inhabitable living conditions (see [here](#), for example), at least these companies were specialist accommodation providers. Now they have been replaced by multinational security companies with abhorrent track records of abusing migrants and refugees in their care. Both G4S and Serco are also taking over public services across the country, including hospitals, schools and welfare provision (see [here](#)).

All three companies are expected to sub-contract the actual provision of asylum accommodation to "experienced small, medium and large agencies that have a strong track record in providing accommodation to asylum seekers," in the words of G4S. Creating two levels of contracts (prime contractors who then sub-contract smaller businesses) is a growing trend in the government's outsourcing of public services. However, it also increases bureaucracy and removes accountability even further away from the government.

The new round of contracts was channelled through the UKBA's Commercial and Operational Managers Procuring Asylum Support Services (COMPASS), which was launched in 2009 to "provide ongoing contract provision for asylum and refugee support services." After two supplier conferences in October 2010, the agency held a series of one-to-one meetings with "interested potential commercial partners" to "discuss the feasibility of the different contract delivery models."

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Corporate Watch

c/o Freedom Press
Angel Alley
84b Whitechapel High Street
London, E1 7QX
t: +44 (0)207 426 0005
e: [contact\[at\]corporatewatch.org](mailto:contact[at]corporatewatch.org)

Following the government's spending review in October 2010, the UKBA was quick to announce its intention to "drive down the cost of asylum support" in order to meet the government's cuts targets. A [Freedom of Information request](#) by Inside Housing earlier this year revealed that the agency had planned to slash the amount of money it spends on providing asylum accommodation by 17 per cent, from £164 million in 2010/11 to £135.5 million 2011/12. This was to be achieved mainly through axing the number of contracts the UKBA holds with accommodation providers, particularly those held by local authorities and voluntary-sector providers.

