

Two hundred refugee children missing from government-run UK hotels

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Migrants are brought into Dover harbour onboard a Border Force vessel, after crossing the English Channel, in Dover, the United Kingdom on December 16, 2021 [File: Henry Nicholls/Reuters]

London, January 25 (RHC)-- A British minister has said that 200 asylum-seeking children have gone missing after being placed in hotels run by the Home Office. The admission follows an investigation by The Observer on Saturday in which a whistle-blower from a Home Office hotel said that children were being abducted off the street and forced into cars.

Earlier this week, Home Office minister Simon Murray told the House of Lords that the missing children include one girl and at least 13 children under 16. "The Home Office have no power to detain unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in these hotels and we do know that some of them go missing. Many of them that go missing are subsequently traced," Murray said. He added that the overwhelming majority of the missing children – 176 of 200 – were of Albanian origin.

Police previously sounded the alarm to the Home Office that criminal networks were likely to target children who had arrived in the country alone. According to the Sussex police force, the Home Office began housing asylum seekers in hotels in Brighton and Hove in July 2021. During that time, 137 children were reported missing. Sixty have been found and 76 are under investigation.

The Home Office and local councils have traded blame, each saying the other bears ultimate responsibility for protecting the children. The Labour Party called for an urgent inquiry as Green Party MP Caroline Lucas blasted the ruling Conservatives in Parliament this week. "This is horrific," she said. "Vulnerable children are being dumped by the Home Office."

Rights groups condemned the government, while the Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT), a fostering charity, said the Home Office had ignored its calls to place the children in care homes.

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