

GardaWorld – Summary of Findings

June 2023

This report was prepared by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and provided to the Denver Mayor's Office and City Council Members on June 29, 2023. AFSC's Colorado office led and won a campaign to stop the City from contracting with GardaWorld to provide sheltering services for Denver's newcomers.

Company Summary

GardaWorld is a Canadian private security firm that operates across 45 countries. In addition to providing security guards to government, commercial, and nonprofit clients, it sells security and surveillance equipment and offers armored car, police support, facility management, and other security-related services.

Involvement in Conflict Zones

GardaWorld and its subsidiary Aegis Defense Services (doing business as GardaWorld Federal Services) [contract](#) with the U.S. Department of State and other government agencies to provide armed security guards to "[high-threat areas](#)" around the world. Since the early 2000s, GardaWorld's so-called "[bands of armed men](#)" have been deployed at military bases, embassies and consulates, oilfields, and other facilities in [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#).

The company's involvement in these countries has been the subject of numerous whistleblower reports and lawsuits. In 2020, for example, a former GardaWorld employee [sued](#) the company, [alleging](#) that it had defrauded the federal government for over three years by falsifying the training records of nearly 100 guards and sending them, without adequate training, to carry out security assignments in Afghanistan.

GardaWorld has also been [implicated](#) in cases of human trafficking, corruption, illegal weapons use, and excessive force. In 2022, for instance, a former GardaWorld contractor from Uganda [reported](#) that he was trafficked by the company. After paying a recruiting fee, he was employed by Aegis and stationed in Afghanistan from 2018 to 2020. While working for the company, he was forced to sleep "in a dilapidated building with no air conditioning despite extreme heat, and...to work without a contract, jeopardizing his ability to get medical care in a war zone." Years prior, in 2012, two GardaWorld contractors working in Afghanistan were [detained](#) on suspicion of gun smuggling after being found with "an arsenal of unlicensed AK-47 assault rifles in their sport utility vehicle."

GardaWorld has operated or currently operates in several other conflict zones, including [Chad](#), [Haiti](#), [Libya](#), [Somalia](#), [Ukraine](#), and [Yemen](#). The company's operations in these regions have similarly been rife with misconduct. In April 2023, for example, seven GardaWorld employees were [arrested](#) for carrying unlicensed weapons in Libya. The company, which had been [contracted](#) by government agencies, NGOs, and oil and gas companies in Libya since 2011, was subsequently [ordered](#) to leave the country.

Involvement in "Migrant Sheltering"/Immigration Jails

In recent years, GardaWorld has expanded its operations within the "migrant sheltering" and immigrant detention industries. Since 2015, the company has [provided](#) detention and transportation services to the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), which is responsible for arresting, jailing, and



deporting migrants in Canada. Under “Detention Program” contracts with the CBSA, GardaWorld has overseen the detention and transportation of immigrants [held](#) at the British Columbia Immigration Holding Centre (BCIHC) in Vancouver and the Laval Immigration Holding Centre ([IHC](#)) in Quebec; in immigration “day cells” located in Vancouver’s Library Square; and at several other locations.

Unsafe conditions at these immigrant detention centers have long been reported by human rights organizations and Canadian news media. In January 2022, for example, an immigrant held at the IHC [died](#) after being found in “medical distress.” In the year following the onset of COVID-19, detained immigrants [went on hunger strike](#) at least three times to protest inhumane and “[life-threatening](#)” conditions—a lack of COVID-19 safety protocols and mental health resources, the use of solitary confinement, and limited access to bathroom and telephone use—at the same detention center. In addition to [failing to comply](#) with COVID-19 safety protocols, GardaWorld security guards reportedly [retaliated](#) against hunger strikers by conducting frequent, disruptive searches and refusing individuals access to water.

GardaWorld also operates several controversial “migrant shelters” in the U.S., including the Fort Bliss military base-turned-shelter in El Paso, Texas. According to several GardaWorld employees’ LinkedIn profiles (see [here](#) and [here](#), for example), the company has operated at the shelter since it [opened](#) in March 2021 as an Office of Refugee Resettlement Emergency Intake Site (EIS) for jailing up to 10,000 unaccompanied children.

In September 2022, the Health and Human Services Office (HHS) Inspector General [released](#) a 58-page report [detailing inhumane conditions](#), deficient case management, and “the deteriorating mental health of unaccompanied minors housed at the Fort Bliss tent camp.” According to the report, children at Fort Bliss are held in hastily erected tents and go weeks without seeing their case managers, leading to emotional distress, anxiety, panic attacks, and self-harm. The report [revealed](#) that a security guard—presumably a GardaWorld employee—physically restrained a migrant child and transported her to a psychiatric facility after she “began to hit and cut herself in front of a group of children after learning that her mother had not yet been contacted by a case manager.”

Despite its “[gross mismanagement](#)” of Fort Bliss, GardaWorld was [awarded](#) a \$2.7 million contract in July 2023 by El Paso County commissioners for transporting migrants released from immigration custody. The contract will potentially [include](#) the transport of hundreds of migrants a day to and from detention centers and U.S. Customs and Border Protection processing facilities. Additionally, the company operates “emergency shelters” and migrant relocation programs in [Chicago](#), [Florida](#), and [San Antonio](#). (Publicly available information on the company’s involvement in immigrant sheltering/detention in these locations is limited.)

GardaWorld has also expanded—or attempted to expand—its reach within the immigrant detention industry through acquisitions of and partnerships with other security and surveillance companies. In December 2022, GardaWorld risk management subsidiary Crisis24 [announced](#) a new partnership with [Palantir](#), a high-tech surveillance company that, among other things, designs systems used to surveil immigrants and carry out [immigration raids](#), [deportations](#), and [family separations](#). In February 2021, GardaWorld [made an offer](#) to acquire [G4S](#), the world’s largest private security company, which conducts deportations and “detainee transportation” for the U.S. government and operates private prisons in Australia and the United Kingdom. GardaWorld did not win the bid to acquire G4S.

