



Home Office

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration

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Dear Maya,

Thank you for your email of 28 March to the Prime Minister on behalf of the signatories, regarding the Illegal Migration Bill. Your correspondence has been passed to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister of State for Immigration.

The volume of illegal small boat arrivals has simply overwhelmed our asylum system. The backlog of asylum claims has ballooned to over 160,000 with the asylum system now costing the British taxpayer £3 billion a year. Since 2018, some 85,000 people have illegally entered the UK by small boat – 45,000 of them in 2022 alone. All travelled through safe countries in which they could and should have claimed asylum. We have a duty to house them and the bill for hotel rooms has now reached £6 million a day. That is unsustainable. The small boats problem is part of a larger global migration crisis, but one that this Government is committed to tackling, including with international partners.

Aside from the huge cost to the British taxpayer, the risk remains that these individuals just disappear. When we try to remove those whose claims are dismissed, they turn our generous modern slavery laws against us to prevent removal. The need for reform has been obvious and urgent.

As you may be aware, stopping small boats crossing the Channel was one of the five promises the Prime Minister made to the British people in January 2023. The only way to stop the boats and deter illegal migration is to make clear that if you arrive here illegally you are not going to be able to stay here. Instead, you may be detained and promptly removed either to your home country or a safe third country. This is the only way to deliver the deterrent needed to stop people making these dangerous, unnecessary, and illegal crossings. These people-smuggling gangs who coordinate the crossings exploit the vulnerable and use their profit for other criminal activity such as drugs and weapons smuggling. By removing their clients, we remove their profit and reduce their other activity.

There is, however, no single silver bullet answer to stopping the boats. This is why we are working internationally with France with whom we have agreed a new package. This package is supported by around £475 million of UK funding: £124 million in 2023-24, £167 million in 2024-25 and £183 million in 2025-26. This deal will see an uplift of 500 law enforcement and human resources staff deployed in northern France, a new French

retention centre built in Dunkirk to increase the number of returns from France and prevent reattempts to cross the Channel to the UK, and a Zonal Coordination Centre in Lille to enhance the operational response to prevent further small boat crossings.

The ground-breaking Rwanda Economic and Migration Partnership will provide individuals relocated with support to build new lives there, while disrupting the business model of people-smuggling gangs by removing their source of income. The Home Office has always maintained that this policy is lawful, and the High Court has upheld this. Our own assessment of Rwanda has found it is a fundamentally safe and secure country with a track record of supporting asylum seekers. We are committed to making this Partnership work – our focus remains on moving ahead with the policy as soon as possible and we stand ready to defend against any further legal challenge.

It is important to note that there is, of course, a key difference between human trafficking and smuggling. The former is a form of exploitation of the victim for gain or other benefit and is regarded as a violation of that person's freedom and integrity.

The latter occurs when an individual seeks the help of a facilitator to enter a country illegally, and the relationship between both parties ends once the transaction ends. Many of those who enter the UK illegally do so by this route. This is a violation of state sovereignty.

The UK Government is committed to supporting victims of modern slavery and will continue to do so through the National Referral Mechanism. But it is vital that the Government takes steps to reduce or remove incentives for individuals to enter the country illegally. These illegal practices pose an exceptional threat to public order, risk lives, and place unprecedented pressure on public services.

This is what the modern slavery measures in the Illegal Migration Bill are seeking to address. We have designed this to be compliant with our international obligations. The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (or what is often referred to as 'ECAT') recognises that the duty of signatory states to provide potential victims with a recovery period, appropriate support and protection from removal may be withheld on grounds of 'public order'.

This is not a blanket approach. Where the Home Secretary is satisfied that an individual is participating in an investigation or criminal proceedings relating to the individual's alleged exploitation, and considers that it is necessary for the person to be present in the UK to provide that cooperation and considers that the cooperation outweighs any significant risk of serious harm to the public the individual may pose, that individual will be exempt from the disqualification.

As we reduce illegal migration, we will do more to help the most vulnerable who are at risk of war and persecution through safe and legal routes. Since 2015, the UK has offered safety to nearly half a million people from all over the world using our global routes as well as our country-specific routes for Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong, and Ukraine. The Bill will introduce an annual cap, to be determined by Parliament, on the number of refugees the UK will accept, once illegal migration is under control. This will allow us to plan for an orderly system, in conjunction with local authorities, that takes into consideration local capacity for accommodation, public services, and support. This will help avoid a repeat of the use of hotels to accommodate people. The only way to come to the UK for protection should be through safe and legal routes. This will take power out of the hands of the criminal gangs and protect vulnerable people, including children.

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, in the face of today's global migration crisis, our

previous asylum laws are being systematically abused and are simply not fit for purpose. With 100 million people displaced around the world, our compassion to help may be infinite, but our capacity to do so is not. The British people are, above all else, fair. It is this sense of fairness that is so affronted by the queue jumping, the gaming of our system, and the flagrant law breaking in the small boats crisis. The British people are also patient. But their patience has run out. Enough is enough. We must stop the boats.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration