

Safe passage for refugees: humane alternative to the Rwanda policy

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Executive summary

The Government announced in April this year that they intend to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, in an attempt to deter people from making the journey across the English Channel. This paper sets out the Rwanda policy and discusses possible alternative policy solutions to the current dangerous and uncontrolled situation in the Channel.

The number of people trying to enter the UK in small boats has continued to rise in recent years and, since the Rwanda deportation policy was announced, the number of channel crossings has hit an all-time high.

There are concerns that the policy is unlawful, as it potentially breaches international human rights law and refugee law, and the policy's legality is being challenged in the courts. The Government has been heavily criticised for trying to force through a potentially unlawful policy, rather than addressing the issue of safe passage for asylum seekers.

The policy seeks to target those who enter the UK "illegally", despite the reality that the vast majority of persons seeking asylum in the UK have no way to legally travel here. These people are left with no other choice than to pay people smugglers and make the perilous journey to the UK.

This paper sets out the case for a Safe Passage Visa, which would allow refugees a visa, for travel purposes only, so that they can cross the Channel safely. This would mean refugees wouldn't need to risk their lives in Channel crossings and would break the people smugglers' business model.

On arrival in the UK they would claim asylum under the normal asylum process – meaning that if they do not satisfy the requirements to claim asylum in the UK, their claims would fail.

A similar visa system was set up in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and since then, there has been no single reported incident of a Ukrainian refugee crossing the Channel in a small boat or a Ukrainian refugee drowning.

As is currently the case for asylum screening processes, an online screening process would be required for the visas to be issued only to those who have a viable asylum claim. Online screening would mean there would be no need for processing centres in France and consequently no build-up of refugees in Calais.

This paper also highlights the calls made by the union representing Home Office and Border staff, PCS, which has

stated the need for a quicker and more efficient asylum application process that would reduce the significant expense of refugees staying in UK hotels and rented accommodation at taxpayers' expense.

Rather than handing over vast amounts of public money to private hotel owners and landlords, this money would be better spent in the Home Office to ensure the department and its workers have the resources available to handle asylum claims quicker.

Some asylum seekers find themselves in immigration detention centres and can be held for an unlimited amount of time. This paper will address the unfairness of this system and the alternatives that provide a better environment for asylum seekers and the workers who process their claims.

Advocates for an alternative to the Rwanda policy point to the record numbers of people crossing the Channel as evidence that the policy is failing as a deterrent. More people are putting themselves and their families at risk and there is no sign that the numbers will ease.

The Rwanda policy fails to address the key issues of safe passage for those who want to claim asylum in the UK. The insistence on pursuing such a policy is cruel, inhumane and puts many more people at risk of danger and exploitation.

There is a viable alternative - an alternative that has already been used in the UK for Ukrainian refugees and others – that massively reduces these risks. A Safe Passage Visa is the most effective way to stop people smuggling and ensure refugees are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

The paper's key demands are:

- Implementation of a **Safe Passage Visa Scheme**, to allow refugees to enter the UK safely and begin their asylum claim.
- **Greater investment in the Home Office** to ensure that staff in the department have the time, space and resources to properly determine asylum claims; **free from political pressure and interference**.
- **Reform of immigration detention centres**, so refugees are helped rather than punished; and to provide a better working environment for staff to **produce better outcomes and a supportive environment for refugees**.

4 Rwanda Policy and Safe Passage Visas Paper

What is the “Rwanda Policy” and why does the Government want to implement it?

On 14 April 2022, the Government formally announced the policy to forcibly send people seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda¹. The policy – officially known as the Migration and Economic Development Partnership – will see asylum applicants whose claims are deemed ‘inadmissible’ relocated to Rwanda.

An asylum claim is deemed inadmissible, and the applicant therefore eligible to be removed to Rwanda, if the Home Office determines in its screening process that the applicant’s journey to the UK can be described as having been dangerous, if the applicant has previously been present in, or had a connection to, another country in which they could have claimed asylum,² and if they travelled on or after 1 January 2022.

Home Office guidance states that a “dangerous journey is one able or likely to cause harm or injury. For example, this would include those that travel via small boat, or clandestinely in lorries.”

The processing of such applications will be undertaken by the Rwanda government and the sole responsibility for the applicant’s asylum claim will be with Rwanda. Unlike other countries with similar policies, such as Australia, which has implemented offshore processing for asylum claims, those with successful claims when relocated to Rwanda will remain there.

When the policy was launched, the then Home Secretary Priti Patel wrote that the aims were to “tackle illegal immigration, control our borders and crack down on the criminal gangs exploiting this international crisis”.³ The Government has been explicit in their references to people who enter the UK via small boats and lorries and they intend to use relocation to Rwanda as a deterrent.

Inhumane Policy

The policy has been condemned by charities, trade unions and international refugee organisations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said in a legal analysis that the Rwanda policy is “incompatible with the letter and spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention”.⁴

The Refugee Council has raised serious concerns about the externalisation of asylum claims and the knock-on effect this could have: “Denying anyone the right to claim asylum in the UK is very concerning, it erodes the very foundation of not only our domestic humanitarian protection regime but creates an alarming precedent which other countries might follow. As a

result, we are likely to see a lowering of humanitarian standards globally and such a situation will have dire consequences when countries are shifting responsibility for refugee protection to a third country.”⁵

Rwanda’s human rights record has also been highlighted, with the country accused of routinely suppressing political opposition, using torture and discriminating against members of the LGBTQI+ community.⁶

In July last year, the UK’s International Ambassador for Human Rights raised concerns regarding Rwanda’s human rights record, specifically its rejection of the UK’s recommendation to “conduct transparent, credible and independent investigations into allegations of human rights violations including deaths in custody and torture.”⁷

Officials within the Government also raised concerns about the policy, as shown by documents disclosed as part of a High Court hearing.⁸ The documents show that Priti Patel pushed through the policy despite concerns about the country’s human rights record and the “limited evidence about whether these proposals will be a sufficient deterrent for those seeking to enter the UK illegally”.

The UK Government is aware of the many concerns and has tried to suppress them. The Foreign Office had been due before the summer parliamentary recess to publish its annual human rights report but still has not done so.⁹ It is expected that the report will be highly critical of Rwanda’s human rights record and it has been alleged that the publication might have been delayed to protect the deportation policy.

PCS, which represents workers in the Home Office who are expected to deliver the policy, has been highly critical of it.¹⁰ The union has said that expecting staff to carry out such a policy is counter to its aims of improving the working environment in which its members operate.

PCS members working in this area have stated their desire to work in a system that is humane and fair, which offers dignity and respect for refugees and workers.¹¹ Members have stated their desire to be given the resources and time needed to effectively handle claims, rather than being used by government ministers who are seeking to score political points.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-first-partnership-to-tackle-global-migration-crisis>

2 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1084315/inadmissibility.pdf

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/world-first-partnership-to-tackle-global-migration-crisis>

4 <https://www.ein.org.uk/news/unhcr-uks-migration-partnership-rwanda-unlawful-and-incompatible-refugee-convention>

5 <https://media.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/28142150/Refugee-Councils-briefing-outsourcing-and-Rwanda-Final.pdf>

6 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/rwanda>

7 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-universal-periodic-review-adoption-rwanda>

8 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/19/uk-officials-raised-concerns-over-rwanda-policy-documents-show>

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/aug/19/liz-truss-accused-of-delaying-human-rights-report-over-criticism-of-rwanda>

10 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news-events/news/rwanda-policy-immoral-unlawful-unworkable>

11 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news-events/news/pcs-brings-legal-challenge-against-plans-send-asylum-seekers-rwanda>

Legality of the Rwanda policy

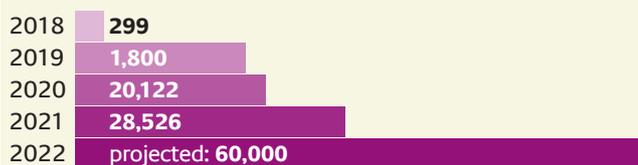
The lawfulness of the Rwanda policy is currently being challenged in court on several bases, including:

- The Policy is unlawful as it exposes the asylum-seekers to breaches of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- The Policy is unlawful because Rwanda will not discharge the UK's full obligations under the Refugee Convention
- The policy amounts to unlawful penalisation contrary to Article 31 of the Refugee Convention, which recognises that refugees may have no legal way to enter a country in which they are seeking asylum, and precludes 'penalties' being imposed on them on account of that 'illegal' entry.

Channel crossings in small boats

The Government wants to use the Rwanda policy and other measures to reduce the number of people entering the UK in small boats. Figures up to 14 August 2022 show that so far this year, over 22,000 people had crossed the Channel in small boats, which is almost double the number up to the same point in 2021.

The number of people making the journey has increased year on year¹²



The total number of people who crossed in 2021 was a nearly 9,000% increase on 2018.

Since the Rwanda policy was announced in April this year, people in small boats coming to the UK has continued to rise. Analysis of data from the beginning of August this year¹³ shows that over 8,000 people have made the journey across the Channel.

On Monday 22 August this year, a new record was set for the number of people who crossed the Channel in small boats in a single day¹⁴. 1,295 people, in 27 boats, made the crossing, surpassing the previous record set in November of the previous year.

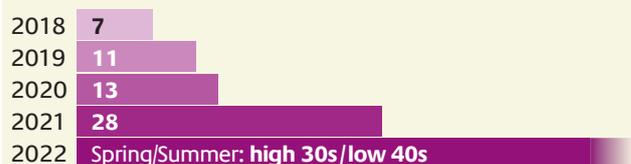
¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-weekly-data>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-weekly-data/weekly-number-of-migrants-detected-in-small-boats-1-august-to-7-august-2022>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats>

The number of people on boats has increased year-on-year

Data: Ministry of Defence¹⁵



Data from the Ministry of Defence¹⁵ shows that since 2018, the number of people on boats has increased year-on-year: in 2018 there were an average of seven people on a small boat, in 2019 an average of 11 people per boat, and in 2020 an average of 13 people per boat and in 2021 an average of 28 per boat.

The figures for Spring and Summer this year show more days with an average number of people in a single boat in the high 40s or low 50s.

Far from the Rwanda policy deterring people from making the dangerous journey across the Channel, more people are crossing than ever before in dangerously overcrowded boats. November last year saw the deadliest day on record, as 31 people drowned, including a pregnant woman.¹⁶

It has been claimed by Priti Patel that 70% of those crossing the Channel in small boats are economic migrants. Research from both the UNHCR and Refugee Council disputes this, with analysis of data showing that "the majority of men, women and children who cross the Channel in small boats are likely to be recognised as needing protection as a result of an asylum claim and allowed to remain in the UK".

During the summer of 2022, the number of Albanians making the journey on small boats began to increase. 2,165 Albanians were recorded as arriving in the UK by small boats between January and June 2022, compared with just 23 detected in the same period the previous year.¹⁷ Albania is designated as a safe country by the Home Office but data shows that the majority (53%) of Albanians who make the crossing are granted asylum.¹⁸

The Refugee Council and others have said that the crossings are being exploited by criminal gangs, with many refugees having been trafficked and are victims of criminal and sexual exploitation¹⁹. There are worrying signs that the success of small boat crossings is changing behaviours and this is being exploited by traffickers. This is a relatively new phenomenon and data is still being collected but this latest development makes it even more imperative that action is taken to stop boat crossings via the facilitation of safe passage.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-weekly-data/weekly-number-of-migrants-detected-in-small-boats-1-august-to-7-august-2022>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/24/several-people-dead-migrant-boat-capsizes-channel>

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/25/proportion-refugees-granted-uk-asylum-hits-32-year-high>

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2022/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to>

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/aug/25/proportion-refugees-granted-uk-asylum-hits-32-year-high>

Safe and legal routes

Under international law, claiming asylum is not illegal. Anyone has the right to apply for asylum in a country that has signed the 1951 Convention on Human Rights and can stay in that country until their claim has been assessed.²⁰

When the Rwanda policy was launched in April this year, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said “it is a plan that will ensure the UK has a world-leading asylum offer, providing generous protection to those directly fleeing the worst of humanity, by settling thousands of people every year through safe and legal routes”.²¹

This desire to encourage people to use safe routes does not take into account the fact that for many people, there is no safe route for them to enter the UK due to the narrow scope of current schemes. If there was a safe route by which people could enter the UK and claim asylum, it is difficult to see why tens of thousands would make the dangerous journey in small boats. People are left with no other choice.

Refugee Family Reunion is one of the safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum to use. It is a safe way for someone who has already been granted refugee status in the UK to be joined by their family. Since 2018, 29,000 people have safely come to the UK under this scheme, 90% being women and children.²²

Changes to Family Reunion - through the Nationality and Borders Act- limit the number of people able to enter the UK under this scheme. It is estimated that 3,500 people per year will be prevented from joining their families, with 17,500 people being excluded from this safe and legal route over the next five years.²³ Rather than limiting the scope of this system, the Government should be expanding it so fewer people resort to making dangerous journeys to the UK.

Another of the safe and legal routes that are available is Refugee Resettlement. The UNHCR identifies refugees in need of resettlement and they then submit these candidates to the UK Government, which decides which cases to accept. If their case is accepted, they are safely transferred to the UK, where they are given support from local councils and charities.

For most people wanting to claim asylum, this process is not available as the numbers resettled globally are minimal. In fact, less than 1% of refugees are eligible for resettlement²⁴, and in the last year, only 1,622 refugees have been resettled in the UK²⁵. Although thousands of refugees miss out on specific schemes to bring them to the UK due to eligibility criteria, this does not mean they are ineligible for protection under the Refugee Convention.

The current schemes made available to Ukrainians involve issuing visas. The sponsorship scheme allows people living in the UK to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to come to live in the UK with them, providing they have suitable accommodation to offer. The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members in the UK.

Concerns have been raised about this because these schemes are not available to refugees of any other nationalities. The Government launches specific and time-limited schemes in reaction to world events, for specific nationalities, such as Afghans, Ukrainians and Hong Kong residents. These are not the only places in the world which create refugees and despite being in equal need of protection, the overwhelming majority cannot enter the UK through these legal routes.

Asylum and safe passage

At present, there is no system in place that allows a person seeking asylum - other than the nationality-specific schemes that have already been mentioned - to apply for a visa to enter the UK, so that they can subsequently make an asylum claim on arrival.

Therefore, people who are unable to enter the UK through either the refugee Family Reunion or refugee resettlement schemes (i.e. the vast majority of refugees) can only do so without official permission, for example in the back of lorries or by crossing the Channel in a small boat.

Should the Government offer safe passage visas to other refugees, in a similar way to how this is done for Ukrainians and had been done for other nationalities after specific global events, this would achieve the Government’s stated objectives for the Rwanda policy more humanely and effectively.

There is evidence, via the Ukrainian schemes, that safe passage works: no Ukrainians have crossed on small boats or drowned in the Channel, and no Ukrainians have paid people smugglers because when safe and legal routes exist, refugees use them.

Deterrence and numbers

A distinction should be made between deterring people from making dangerous journeys and deterring people from claiming asylum in the UK.

Dangerous journeys

In recent years, the Government has tried various strategies to reduce the number of people crossing the Channel by dangerous means. However, none have had any impact and numbers continue to rise. If people were applying for visas to travel to the UK, the Government would have visibility in

20 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/#:~:text=The%20Universal%20Declaration%20of%20Human,where%20they%20risk%20being%20persecuted>

21 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-action-to-tackle-illegal-migration-14-april-2022>

22 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/government-plans-will-all-but-destroy-main-safe-route-out-of-conflict-for-women-and-children-at-risk-warns-refugee-council/>

23 <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/government-plans-will-all-but-destroy-main-safe-route-out-of-conflict-for-women-and-children-at-risk-warns-refugee-council/>

24 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/resettlement.html>

25 <https://refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/refugee-asylum-facts/refugee-resettlement-facts/>

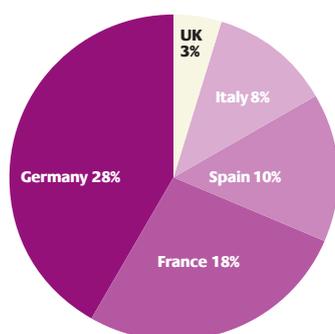
respect of people who are arriving.

Evidence presented to the Home Affairs Select Committee in September 2020 was that 98% of people crossing on small boats claim asylum on arrival in the UK²⁶. It follows that 98% of those crossing on small boats would transition over to the new safe and legal route. By removing 98% of the people smugglers' business, their operation would be transformed from a multi-million-pound enterprise to a small and insignificant activity. Far more importantly, lives would be saved.

Claiming asylum in the UK

In 2021, 7% of refugees in Europe came to the UK to claim asylum²⁷. This means that 93% claimed asylum in other EU countries, for example, 28% went to Germany, 18% went to France, 10% went to Spain, and 8% went to Italy²⁸. It is a common misconception that 'all' refugees want to come to the UK; in fact, most do stay in other safe countries.

The most common reasons for travelling onwards to the UK



are family and community ties; and language. People with those ties are already coming to the UK. People do not choose to stay in their dangerous home countries or go to a different country, because of UK Government policy. The fact is that most refugees who come to

Europe do not try to come to the UK – they claim asylum elsewhere, and would continue to do so.

Those who are turned down

There would be people who are denied a visa and there would be a risk of these people considering a dangerous journey as before.

However, it should be remembered that 98% of those who cross on small boats claim asylum on arrival – the incentive to cross is the hope of a safe life. If the visa is denied that possibility is removed. It is one thing to risk your life for the hope of a safe future, quite another to risk it for a life of permanent precarity.

While safe passage is a more effective way of achieving the Government's objectives than the Rwanda policy, more importantly, it will be more humane and will not risk breaching international law. The Rwanda policy risks making the UK complicit in human rights violations. This is a not-insignificant risk and has implications for the Home Office staff who will be implementing the policy.

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/commonshomeaffs/status/1301572511201665024>

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-december-2021/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#asylum-applications>

²⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/asylum-applications-eu/>

Practical matters

A similar idea, humanitarian visas, has been used by some countries, particularly by some EU member states as a means to reduce the number of migrants making the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean.²⁹ France was one of the countries to offer humanitarian visas and between 2013 and 2016, the country granted over 3,000 humanitarian visas to Syrian refugees.³⁰ Other countries that use humanitarian visas (although not always referred to as such) include Belgium, Switzerland, Russia, Argentina, Brazil and the United States.

In December 2021, a group of MPs tabled an amendment to the Nationality and Borders Bill that sought to include the provision of humanitarian visas for refugees based in France wanting to enter the UK.³¹

One of the major barriers to this proposal, and others like it in the past, is the extreme resistance on the part of France to anything that might cause a build-up of refugees in or around Calais and the resulting questions about their living conditions.

The experience with Ukrainian refugees once more suggests a solution. Very quickly after the introduction of the Ukrainian visas, the system switched to an online system via which visas can be applied for from anywhere in Europe. The UK has an existing network of visa centres across Europe which can be visited if people have difficulties, for example with documentation. This is why there has not been a build-up of Ukrainian refugees in Calais.

The more likely and the real practical issue would be the potential for the visas to be declined as a means to prevent people from getting to the UK to make an asylum application in the first place. In this case, we would quickly return to the position of many people in Calais crossing over in small boats. The visa system will only work if there is a real will from Government for it to do so. The incentive would be the fact that there would be political capital to be gained from halting small boat crossings, which the Rwanda policy will not do.

The related issue that should be addressed is the current excessive and unnecessary costs of the UK asylum system, which have been estimated at £5m per day for keeping people in hotels³². The sensible step that should be taken is an urgent initiative to, firstly, process as many outstanding claims as possible and, secondly, speed up the processing of new claims. People with status can work, support themselves and pay taxes. There is no need for them to be living in hotels at taxpayer expense.

Investment in the Home Office

This would require significant investment in the Home Office.

²⁹ <https://redcross.eu/projects/humanitarian-visas-in-practice>

³⁰ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/150782/eprs-study-humanitarian-visas.pdf>

³¹ <https://www.jcwi.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3e589cfe-383e-40a1-ac82-eb3430e7b1d7>

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/faster-accommodation-moves-for-unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children>

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The thinking of the Government in May 2022 was the opposite, with plans published to cut over 91,000 jobs from the civil service.³³ Each Government department would be expected to identify where 20% of jobs could be lost, to reduce the civil service headcount to pre-2016 levels.

For the Home Office to effectively process asylum claims, deal with backlogs and handle the Channel crossings crisis, it needs more resources, not less. The lack of resources that have been available to the Home Office has been highlighted by PCS after it was announced in May this year that the government intends to return the Civil Service headcount to 2016 levels. This would see the overall Civil Service headcount drop by 91,000 and around 10,000 in the Home Office.³⁴

Staff who deal with asylum applications want what is best for those who use the system and it is a system they have valuable knowledge of, and experience in. This expertise should be utilised by Government, campaigners and policymakers when discussing the solutions needed to ensure safe passage for refugees.

How a safe passage visa system would work:

A safe passage visa would enable a qualifying person to travel safely to the UK so that they could claim asylum on arrival. They would then go through the normal UK asylum process, meaning that if it were ultimately determined that they were ineligible for asylum, they would not be allowed to stay in the UK.

A person would qualify if:

- They are in the EU;
- They are not an EU national or a national of Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland; and
- They have a viable claim for asylum in the UK.

There would be no fee for the application and legal aid would be available for any appeal.

The visa would be applied for online and, if successful, the applicant would be sent an electronic letter that they could use to enter the UK. Necessary documents would be uploaded with the application or, if this is not possible, the applicant could visit a visa centre located across Europe. On arrival in the UK, they would be required to visit a UK centre to provide biometric data.

The scheme differs from the humanitarian visa schemes due to the main intention of the safe passage visa scheme being to get an applicant to the UK safely, and they would then enter the normal asylum process on arrival in the UK.

33 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news-events/news/pcs-condemns-johnsons-mass-civil-service-job-cuts-plan>
34 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news-events/news/pcs-rejects-governments-announcement-slash-thousands-home-office-jobs>

A humanitarian visa scheme application process involves greater processing and screening.

Immigration detention

The paper refers to this issue because under the proposed safe passage visa scheme, asylum seekers will enter the application process in the normal way. It is therefore possible that an applicant entering the UK may at some point enter an immigration detention centre.

An asylum seeker can be detained during different stages of their asylum application process, where they may be subjected to deportation orders or have been detained after renewing their visa. For those who are detained, the procedure they are engaged in is an administrative one, not a criminal one, as they have not committed any crimes.

In the UK, there are around 24,000 people detained every year, at several sites across the country, some of which are operated by private companies.³⁵ The UK is the only country in Europe that places no time limit on how long someone can be held in immigration detention³⁶. There is also a significant cost to immigration detention, with the latest data available showing that the cost per person per year was £34,514³⁷.

Several organisations have been critical of the immigration detention system, with arguments that people are treated as criminals and often detained for long periods, to the detriment of their physical and mental health³⁸.

This paper seeks to highlight the alternatives proposed to the current system.

“It is cheaper, more humane and more effective to uphold the liberty of migrants while their cases are progressing and to provide them with casework support in the community”³⁹ – *Detention Action*

This ensures that those entering this country to flee persecution and harm are not subjected to further distressing treatment in the UK asylum system.

While this paper focuses on the specific issue of safe passage for refugees, the issue of community-based support for all asylum seekers has relevance. The support discussed above should include all those who enter the asylum process, not just as an alternative for those who are held in detention centres.

Investment in these services should be seen as an interim measure to solve the problems associated with the asylum process, such as the negative impact on asylum seekers’

35 <https://detentionaction.org.uk/about-detention/what-is-immigration-detention/>
36 <https://aviddetention.org.uk/immigration-detention/what-immigration-detention>
37 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-enforcement-data-february-2020>
38 <https://detentionaction.org.uk/get-involved/end-indefinite-detention/>
39 <https://detentionaction.org.uk/community-support-project/>

mental health, poor quality and high-cost accommodation and isolation from society.

The quickest and most effective way solve to these problems, as has been referenced earlier in this paper, is the fast and efficient processing of claims. The sooner a decision can be made on a claim, the less time and money is being spent on temporary housing and other costs, and the sooner refugees can begin to participate fully in society, find work and get to know people in their community.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need for the creation of safe and legal routes for refugees. Early analysis shows that since the Rwanda policy was announced, the policy has had the opposite effect to the one intended, with record numbers of people making the dangerous crossing.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak fully supports the Rwanda policy and has said he will do 'whatever it takes' to make it work. He also reinstated Suella Braverman as Home Secretary, who said it was her 'dream' and 'obsession' to see a flight take asylum seekers to Rwanda.

It's a hugely worrying indication that in the face of mounting evidence that the policy is cruel and unworkable, this government fully intends to implement it.

This paper has set out the opposition to the policy and takes the crucial step of proposing an alternative. The safe passage visa scheme seeks to overcome the main hurdle faced by those wanting to seek asylum, which is getting to the UK to start their claim. Refugees who have to make incredibly dangerous journeys from their home country should not be faced with further life-threatening obstacles to claiming asylum in the UK.

With more people crossing than ever before, a safe passage visa scheme could:

- Drastically reduce the number of people forced to make the dangerous journey in small boats.
- Break the model of people smugglers.
- Provide control over who is entering the from Europe UK.
- Address our humanitarian obligations.
- Remove the risk of the UK being complicit in human rights violations via the Rwanda policy.

This government should be committed to a fair and humane asylum system. It is so far failing and it is refugees who are paying the price.

The Rwanda policy is unimaginably callous and cruel. It's refugees – and civil servants who will have to effect this cruel policy – who will both suffer. This paper is an important step in the pursuit of an asylum system that treats people humanely and with dignity.

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