



HM Government

RESTORING ORDER AND CONTROL

A statement on the government's asylum and returns policy

November 2025



Government of the United Kingdom
Home Office

Restoring Order and Control

A statement on the government's asylum and returns policy

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of His Majesty

November 2025



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Foreword from the Prime Minister

For any government, the UK's values serve as the ultimate guide, our fixed point in a turning world. But when the world changes, it is our responsibility to renew the application of those values as new challenges arise. And the world has changed. It is more volatile and insecure, with increased conflict leading to a significant increase in the movement of people across the globe. Our asylum system was not designed to cope with this. Nor were our rules designed for the situation that sees asylum seekers travelling through multiple safe countries before seeking to cross the English Channel by boat.



The result is a severe strain on both our asylum system and our wider social contract. The UK is a decent, compassionate, tolerant country that celebrates diversity and wants those values reflected in its institutions – that has not changed. But demonstrating control at our borders is not just an essential task of government. It is also vital for maintaining confidence in those values as we navigate our changing world. This statement sets out our plan to achieve that.

It starts with a simple premise. That there is nothing compassionate about allowing the vile trade in people-smuggling that perpetuates illegal migration to persist. This then leads to a conclusion that must be confronted. That the UK's current asylum regime is a significant pull factor to that trade, more permissive than the European mainstream. Which then also creates a strong and perverse incentive for migrants who have arrived legally to switch into the asylum system once here.

The case for reform is then devastatingly simple. That if we want to see fewer channel crossings, less exploitation and a fairer system with safe and legal routes, we need an approach with a stronger deterrent effect and rules that are robustly enforced.

The principle that people genuinely fleeing danger and persecution should be welcomed is one this government will always defend – an expression of the UK's values in action. But that principle depends upon social confidence that our asylum system is fair, effective and humane. This statement shows how a reformed asylum system, that deters arrivals and speeds up the removals of those with no legal right to be here, can deliver that confidence in a dangerous world.

Foreword from the Home Secretary

This statement sets out the most sweeping asylum reforms in modern times. They are commensurate to the scale of the challenge we face.

In an increasingly volatile and more mobile world, huge numbers of people are on the move. While some are genuine refugees, others are economic migrants, seeking to take advantage of the asylum system. Even amongst those who are genuine refugees, economic incentives are at play. Instead of stopping at the first safe country even genuine refugees are searching for the most attractive place to seek refuge, many now “asylum shop” their way across the continent, in search of the most attractive place to seek refuge.



As a result, in recent years, hundreds of thousands have come to this country seeking asylum. Some have come by illegal routes, most notably small boat channel crossings. But similar numbers have overstayed legal routes into this country, such as visitor, work or study visas.

The impact on this country has been profound. Over 100,000 people now live in asylum accommodation, funded by the taxpayer. Many refugees remain unemployed several years after being granted protection, depending on taxpayer funded benefits to live in the UK. This must change. To the public, who foot the bill, the system feels out of control and unfair. We as a government must be honest. It feels that way because it is. The pace and scale of change has destabilised communities. Illegal migration is making this country a more divided place. It is the job of a government to unite the country. To do so, we must understand why this crisis has happened, and what we can do to address it.

The cause of this crisis is that this country’s asylum system was designed for an earlier and simpler era, and has not been updated to reflect our changing times. Asylum seekers in the UK receive generous support, funded entirely by the taxpayer. To be granted refugee status is to essentially receive the ability to live in this country, forever. Until very recently, a refugee’s family could expect the same.

Where asylum seekers have failed in their claims, many frustrate our attempts to remove them. We have shown ourselves unwilling to show the necessary toughness or resolve to assert our right to return those with no right to be here.

As we have held rigidly to the old model, other countries have tightened theirs. This has been most notable in Denmark, though not exclusively so. There, a radical transformation of the asylum system has taken place. Refugee status has become temporary, and not permanent. Refuge lasts only as long as a safe harbour is genuinely required. And the state

has taken a far more concerted effort to remove those who are failed asylum seekers. Last year, asylum claims in Denmark fell to a 40-year low.

Our failure to change with this changing world has drawn ever more migrants to our shores. In 2024, asylum claims in the UK rose by 18 percent, to a record high. Across Europe, meanwhile, claims fell by 13 percent. We have become the destination of choice in Europe, clearly visible to every people smuggler and would-be illegal migrant across the world.

This statement sets out an entirely new asylum model for this country. Just like in Denmark, refugee status becomes temporary - lasting only until a refugee can safely return home. Asylum seekers and refugees will not be offered the generous terms they currently receive. We will no longer have a duty to support those who have the ability to support themselves, nor those who break our laws or rules. Those who have assets will be forced to contribute to their bed-and-board.

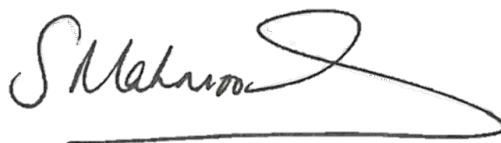
When an asylum seeker has failed in their claim, we will take a far more hard-headed approach to removing them. We will remove people we have not removed before, including families who have a safe home country they can return to. We will remove people to countries where we have, until recently, paused returns. We will reform an asylum appeals system that sometimes seems designed to help frustrate a legitimate removal. And it means tackling a thicket of laws that have achieved the same end, both international and domestic.

These are significant reforms. They are designed to ensure our asylum system is fit for the modern world. And also, that the public consent for having an asylum system at all remains. Genuine refugees will receive the protection they need. With control restored, we will open up new, capped routes for refugees for whom this country will be the first, safe haven they encounter. We will make community sponsorship the norm, so we know that the pace and scale of change does not exceed what a local area is willing to accept.

The last government had the chance to address this. They chose not to. Instead, they distracted themselves with the illusory promise of a pie-in-the-sky Rwanda scheme that led to the lamentable result of £700 million wasted, and just four volunteers removed.

The government - and in particular my predecessor as Home Secretary - rebuilt the foundations of what was a devastated system. Now, asylum decisions are up, the removal of illegal migrants is soaring, and immigration enforcement and arrests are at record levels.

On those foundations, I will now build an asylum system fit for the world as it is.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Mahon', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Introduction

Since 2021, over 400,000 people have claimed asylum in the UK. In the same period just a decade before (2011-2015), that figure was around 150,000.

While small boats are the most visible source of these rising claims, they are not the only one. Of the 111,800 who have claimed asylum this year, 39% (43,600) arrived in a small boat. A further 37% (41,100) arrived first by legal means, on a visa, before claiming asylum. Around 15,000 arrived by other means.¹

Arrivals have grown rapidly, but the removal of illegal migrants has not kept pace, and this has been particularly true in recent years. As the last government focused its attention on the unsuccessful introduction of its Rwanda scheme, asylum decision-making fell as cases were put on hold, with just 30,000 substantive asylum decisions made in the first half of 2024.²

The combination of rising arrivals and falling removals has placed considerable strain on the country and the taxpayer. Around 106,000 asylum seekers are currently receiving state-funded support, with the vast majority living in asylum accommodation. At its peak in 2023, there were 400 asylum hotels across the country, at a daily cost of £9 million, paid for by the taxpayer³.

The government has made significant steps to ramp up the removal of those with no right to be in this country. Asylum decision-making has increased significantly. Around 85,000 initial asylum decisions have been taken since July 2024. As a result, the backlog of cases is now 47% lower than the peak in June 2023, and 18% lower than in June 2024.⁴

Returns have also increased. Since coming to power, removals have reached over 48,000. 36,600 returns occurred in the 12 months to the end of October 2025, a 10% increase on the same period in the previous year. Of these, around 5,400 were foreign national offenders, a 12% increase on the same period in the previous year.⁵

¹ Home Office immigration system statistics data tables, Asylum summary tables, year ending June 2025, Data Table ASY_01c, published 21 August 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68a4601bcd7b7dcfaf2b5eb4/asylum-summary-jun-2025-tables.ods>

² Asylum claims and initial decisions detailed datasets, year ending June 2025, Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68a348baf49bec79d23d297b/asylum-claims-datasets-jun-2025.xlsx>

³ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-01-13/23511>

⁴ Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/returns-from-the-uk-and-illegal-working-activity-since-july-2024/illegal-working-and-enforcement-activity-to-the-end-of-september-2025>, tables Asy_D02, Asy_D03

⁵ Returns from the UK and enforcement activity - GOV.UK, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/returns-from-the-uk-and-illegal-working-activity-since-july-2024>

These measures stand alongside a significant increase in immigration enforcement activity in the UK, including more than 8,000 arrests during illegal working visits in the year up to October 2025. This amounts to a 63% increase on the same period 12 months prior.⁶ This marks a vital step forward. But with illegal arrivals on the scale this country is experiencing, it is clear we must go further.

This statement sets out a vision for how that can be done, focusing on two central objectives. First, how we reduce the flow of arrivals into the UK. Second, how we increase the removal of those who have no legal right to be here. The UK will always remain a place where those who are truly fleeing danger can find safety, and so this statement also sets out a new approach to receiving refugees through safe and legal routes.

There are areas that this statement, with its focus on policy and not operational measures, does not cover. The government is pursuing a number of law enforcement measures to tackle the people smugglers running small boats in the Channel, including those in the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. The government is also working closely with international partners to disrupt the activity of people smugglers operating in Europe and beyond. Those measures are vital to securing our borders and tackling the asylum crisis.

⁶ Illegal working and enforcement activity to the end of September 2025 - GOV.UK, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/returns-from-the-uk-and-illegal-working-activity-since-july-2024/illegal-working-and-enforcement-activity-to-the-end-of-september-2025>

Part I: Reducing Arrivals

It is increasingly clear that asylum seekers are drawn towards the UK as their desired place of refuge, ahead of other safe countries across Europe.

In 2024, the number of people seeking asylum in the UK rose by 18%. In the same period, the EU saw claims fall by 13%.⁷

It is also self-evident that any person who has arrived in the UK via small boat has passed through safe countries on their route. Equally, those who claim asylum after arriving initially by a legal route, such as a work or study visa, have made an active choice to come to the UK.

To deal with the asylum crisis this country faces, we must understand and address what are often called the “pull factors”: the reasons that people are drawn to the UK, instead of other countries.

In this first section, we set out some of the factors pulling people across Europe and towards the UK - and how we can address this imbalance. In doing so, we focus on three areas. First, the generosity of refugee protection in the UK compared to other countries. Second, the extent of the support provided to asylum seekers, including accommodation, while people await a decision on their claim. Third, the ease with which people are entering the illegal economy in the UK, thereby sustaining a life here without a legal right to live or work.

⁷ Asylum and migration in the EU: facts and figures, published 27 August 2025. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20170629STO78630/asylum-and-migration-in-the-eu-facts-and-figures>

1. Protection Rights

The UK's offer to refugees is more expansive than many other European countries. Once granted refugee status, leave to remain lasts for five years. At the end of that period, refugees can immediately apply for settlement, giving them an indefinite right to live in the UK. This application is fee free and essentially automatic, being almost entirely absent of requirements. Until very recently, refugees were also able to bring their family to join them in the UK, again without incurring a fee and without having to demonstrate that they can accommodate or otherwise support them.

When compared to some of our European neighbours, this approach to protection is generous. In Denmark, a country that has tightened its asylum system in recent years, residence permits are issued to refugees for just two years and are designed to be temporary. There are significant requirements on sponsoring family members. Settlement can only be obtained after typically eight years of residence, and is subject to multiple conditions including full-time employment, meeting an earnings threshold, language proficiency and active citizenship.

A new “Core Protection” offer for refugees

This statement sets out a new approach to refugee protection in the UK, which marks a significant change in direction - away from an assumption of offering permanent protection, and towards a more basic, and temporary protection, which we call “Core Protection”.

For people who claim asylum and are granted protection in the UK, we will introduce a new regime that provides support for refugees that is entirely in accordance with our international obligations but does not exceed them.

Shortened leave to remain. Currently, refugees in the UK receive a five-year initial period of leave. In the future this will be reduced significantly. Refugees will instead receive 30 months of leave to remain, which can only be renewed if they are still considered in need of protection. Where protection is no longer needed the person will become liable for removal from the UK.

A longer path to settlement. In the future there will be no path to indefinite settled status in the UK on Core Protection, until a refugee has spent 20 years in the country, an increase on the current five years. Settlement requirements will be considered in an upcoming consultation on earned settlement, covering both legal and illegal migrants.

Protection “work and study” visa route. The government does not believe that refugees should seek to remain on Core Protection long-term. We want to encourage refugees to integrate more fully into the communities providing them sanctuary. To address this, we will encourage refugees to switch out of the Core Protection route wherever possible. We will introduce a new, in-country “protection work and study” route. A person granted protection will be eligible to apply to move into this route if they obtain employment or commence study

at an appropriate level and pay a fee. Once on this route, they will become eligible to “earn” settlement sooner than they would under Core Protection alone.

New requirements on family reunion. Under Core Protection there will be no automatic right to family reunion. Those who successfully move off Core Protection and enter a “work and study” visa route could become eligible to sponsor family members to come to the UK. The same conditions may apply as for other legal migrants and UK citizens.

Reduced right to public funds. The government expects those who are arriving or returning to the UK to seek work. To encourage this, we are now exploring a change to taxpayer-funded benefits to prioritise access for those who are making an economic contribution to the UK. This could see additional criteria that migrants have to meet to receive benefits and actions they need to take in order not to lose them. A consultation on this question will take place in 2026.

We are carefully considering the appropriate pathways for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, asylum-seeking families with children, and other vulnerable asylum seekers. We will take account of their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

2. Asylum Support

Asylum seekers in the UK receive a generous package of state-funded support. This is because we have a legal duty to provide support to asylum seekers who, without our support, would be destitute. As of June 2025, 106,000 asylum seekers were supported in this way, with 103,000 provided accommodation. While we remain committed to supporting those who are destitute, we must also ensure that the offer of accommodation is decent and humane without becoming a pull factor or placing an excessive burden on taxpayers.

Revoking the duty to support. We will remove the current legal obligation to provide support to asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute - a requirement introduced in 2005 to implement EU law, to which the UK is no longer bound. In the coming months this duty will be revoked, and we will restore a discretionary power to offer support, as previously provided under UK law.

In doing so, we will deny support to those who have the right to work and could therefore support themselves. This would include those who enter the country on a work or student visa with permission to work before claiming asylum, or those granted permission to work where their claim has been outstanding for more than 12 months.

We will also deny support to those who have deliberately made themselves destitute. Anyone who has not complied with the conditions we impose - such as the failure to abide by a removal direction or working illegally - will also see their support removed.

Support will also be conditional on asylum seekers complying with UK law. Today, criminality does not exclude an asylum seeker from receiving state support. This is unacceptable, and we will sanction those who take advantage of our generosity. This will extend beyond those who break the law and include those who refuse to relocate to a different accommodation site and those who are disruptive in accommodation setting.

This approach - moving from a “duty” to a “power” - will ensure asylum support is reserved only for those who need it and comply with the system. This follows the compliance-based approach taken in Denmark, Netherlands and France.

Contributions mechanism. In addition, we will require individuals to contribute towards the cost of their asylum support where they have some assets or income, but not enough to support themselves independently. We will also take action to recover support costs in scenarios where any assets are not convertible into cash or declared at the point that asylum support is initially provided but become convertible or are discovered at a later date.

Moving out of hotels. We are aware that the nature of accommodation, as well as its provision, can be a pull factor. Intelligence suggests that the prospect of a paid-for hotel bed is used to lure asylum seekers into small boats. Progress has already been made here. The

number of hotels in use has almost halved since its peak in summer 2023, but we must go further and end their use entirely.⁸

The government has already committed to exiting all asylum hotels by the end of this Parliament, with an ambition to do so as soon as possible before that date. This will see a move towards the use of large sites, including military sites, for asylum accommodation. Last month, the government announced that this would include the proposed use of Cameron Barracks and Crowborough Training Camp.⁹

Several European countries, including Germany, Denmark, Belgium, and Netherlands operate large scale sites for asylum accommodation. These include both purpose-built facilities and repurposed spaces such as schools, community centres, conference venues, hospitals, prisons, care homes, disused industrial sites, and former airports.

⁸ Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament, Available at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-02-21/32327>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-at-military-sites-factsheets>

3. Illegal Working

The ability to enter the UK as an asylum seeker, or live as a failed asylum seeker, should offer little reward. Save for very few exceptions, neither is allowed to work in this country. But this is not the reality. In practice, it is far too easy for people without the right to work to disappear into the UK's illegal economy.

This risk is greater in sectors with high numbers of low-paid jobs such as hospitality and construction, as well as in widely reported areas like delivery driving, nail bars and car washes.

Increased enforcement. Under this government, there has already been a significant crackdown on illegal working - raising enforcement activity to the highest levels in recorded history. In the year ending September 2025, 11,000 raids were carried out by Immigration Enforcement; and by June 2025, over 2,100 civil penalties were issued to employers found to have hired illegal workers totalling over £117 million.¹⁰ Over 1,000 foreign nationals encountered on these operations have since been removed from the country.¹¹

In the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, the government is expanding right-to-work checks to cover categories of employers where there are higher levels of illegal migrants seeking work, including in the gig economy. This will close a current loophole which means that companies using flexible, sub-contracted or self-employed workers have not been required to conduct right-to-work checks, nor have they been made to face significant civil penalties when they are found to be using illegal workers. On 29 October 2025, the government launched a six-week consultation to inform how the changes will be introduced and enforced.

The government is also working with online delivery companies who are now strengthening their right-to-work checks and ID verification across their platforms. We have signed data-sharing agreements with firms to help identify asylum seekers working illegally as delivery riders.

Introduction of digital ID. The government has delivered a roll out of e-visas as a quick and efficient means for employers to check the rights and status of foreign nationals seeking work. We will go further. By the end of this Parliament, a digital ID will be mandatory to prove the right to work in the UK. Alongside transforming public services, this will reduce the ability of illegal workers to use fraudulent documents to gain employment and prevent rogue employers from turning a blind eye to questionable documentation.

¹⁰ Home Office Immigration Enforcement data April to June 2025, data table CP_02, published 21 August 2025. Available at:
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68a3015732d2c63f8693437d/immigration-enforcement-data-apr-jun-2025.ods>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-crackdown-on-illegal-workers-since-records-began>

Part II: Increasing Removals

Once a failed asylum seeker has had their claim rejected, the public reasonably expect they will be removed from the country. However, between June 2024 and June 2025, 58,000 people had their asylum claim refused. In the same period, less than 11,000 people were removed from the country.¹²

In this section, we set out a series of measures designed to increase the rate of removal of illegal migrants from the UK, focusing on five areas. First, scaling up removals of those whose claims have failed. Second, imposing sanctions on countries that refuse to take their citizens back. Third, reforming our appeals system. Fourth, pursuing legal reform, both nationally and internationally. Finally, tackling other barriers that are used today to block removals.

¹² Immigration system statistics, year ending June 2025 - GOV.UK, table Asy_00a and Ret_05

1. Removing failed asylum seekers

In mid-2023 there were more than 41,000 asylum claims that had been rejected but the claimants remained in the UK.¹³ There are some cases in which that is unavoidable. Following the principle of non-refoulement, we will never be a country that sends people back to face torture or threats to life.

However, there are cases where we are currently choosing not to return failed asylum seekers, where the government believes we both could and should be doing so. Our appetite for returning failed asylum seekers has been too limited. Asylum seekers have known that should their claim fail, there is a good chance that the UK government will not return them. Our goal will always be to remove people voluntarily, but where this option is not taken, we must show the consequence will be enforced return. Otherwise, our hesitancy will be used against us.

In order to achieve this, we will:

Continue the French returns pilot. Under a historic agreement with the French government, those who arrive in the UK by small boat can now be detained and sent back to France. In their place, a security-checked migrant arrives via a safe and legal route in the UK. This sends a message to those who cross the Channel illegally, and to those who conduct this trade in human beings: small boat crossings are not worth the risk. This pilot is underway, and the government is working in partnership with French on expansion.

We will, however, be more ambitious and have a higher appetite for removing people with no right to be here.

Resuming removals to certain countries. The government has decided that refugee status should be temporary. We are obliged to offer sanctuary to those who would be in danger if they returned to their country of origin. However, should the regime change in their home country, our approach should change too. If someone has fled the rule of one regime, but that regime has since been replaced, it must be possible to return them to that country. We have already begun supporting people to return to Syria on a voluntary basis, following the toppling of the Assad regime and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the new Syrian government. In the first half of this year, a small number of people have returned in this manner.¹⁴ This follows the approach of Germany, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands and Czechia who have already begun voluntary removals to Syria.

We are now exploring resuming enforced returns to countries where we have not routinely carried out such removals in recent years, including to Syria.

¹³ Migration Transparency Data, Immigration and Protection Data: April to June 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68a44bdd246cc964c53d29b6/immigration-and-protection-data-apr-jun-2025.xlsx>

¹⁴ Home Office returns dataset year ending June 2025, data table Ret_D01, published 21 August 2025. Available at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/689eff4931afb0b64efc4493/returns-datasets-jun-2025.xlsx>

Family removals. We do not currently prioritise the return of families. As a result, many families of failed asylum seekers continue to live in this country, receiving free accommodation and financial support, for years on end. Our hesitancy around returning families creates particularly perverse incentives. To some, the personal benefit of placing a child on a dangerous small boat outweighs the considerable risks of doing so. Once in the UK, asylum seekers are able to exploit the fact that they have had children and put down roots in order to thwart removal, even if their claim has been legally refused. For instance, there are around 700 Albanian families whose asylum claims have been rejected, yet their removal is not currently being enforced by the Home Office, despite Albania having a gold-standard of cooperation with the UK on returns and being a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).¹⁵

The government will offer all families financial support to enable them to return to their home country. Should they refuse that support, we will escalate to an enforced return. We will launch a consultation on the process for enforcing the removal of families, including children.

Under today's legislation, families who have one or more children under the age of 18, at the point they were refused asylum, continue to receive support until the youngest of those children turns 18. This is true even if the family has exhausted all their appeals and is not cooperating with the returns process. This creates a perverse incentive to remain in the UK without status, undermining the integrity of the system. Therefore, as part of the aforementioned consultation, we will consult on commencing measures in the 2016 Immigration Act which will allow us to remove support from families who do not have a genuine obstacle to leaving the country.

Return hubs. We will continue to explore the use of "return hubs" which are safe third countries that failed asylum seekers can be sent to instead of their country of origin. Negotiations with a number of countries are ongoing.

¹⁵ Analysis of internal Home Office data.

2. Visa Penalties

We expect all countries to take back their citizens who have no right to be in the UK. This includes providing travel documents within a reasonable time period. While many countries are fully co-operative with returns arrangements, others delay doing so for months or even years. Some fail to cooperate at all.

Delays to the removals process carry an additional risk. With more time in the country, failed asylum seekers can make further claims and find new ways to frustrate removal. Thereby, removals delayed become removals denied.

Expanding returns agreements. We work bilaterally with countries on returns, and where necessary, sign formal agreements to underpin co-operation. In August 2025, we signed a new agreement with Iraq to establish formal processes to swiftly return those with no legal right to be in the UK. In October 2025, we announced a new agreement with Vietnam that will streamline our returns processes and reduce redocumentation timescales.

For those countries that refuse to comply, we must take action.

Imposing visa penalties. We will act against countries who fail to co-operate with the return of their citizens, including through imposing visa penalties, as provided for in section 72 of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. This could include suspending the granting of entry clearance for nationals of a country until it takes back its citizens who are in the UK illegally.

The imposition of visa penalties on one country will send a message to all. The UK will always be open to talented people, willing to contribute to this country. We will not, however, be willing to keep open legal routes when countries do not co-operate on returns.

3. Appeals Reform

There is no doubt that our immigration system has grown overly complicated and unwieldy. We should have a process whereby an asylum decision is made and an opportunity to appeal on reasonable grounds is provided. Instead, we have a system where failed asylum seekers wait years for decisions to be made and appeals to be heard, and can then bounce around the appeals system launching application after application, and appeal after appeal.

The problem is evident in the huge backlog of cases in the appeals courts. Unresolved appeals have risen from just 7,000 in early 2023, to 51,000 at the end of March 2025.¹⁶ This has resulted in long delays. Between January and March 2025, the average wait time for an appeal was 54 weeks.¹⁷

More capacity in the current system. The government has already increased judicial sitting days in the First Tier Tribunal Immigration and Asylum Chamber. In the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, we are introducing statutory timelines for appeals brought by those in asylum accommodation and non-detained foreign national offenders who are liable to deportation.

However, without more substantial reform we will not fully address the challenges we face.

Creating a new appeals body. We will expand the capacity of the appeals system by creating a new appeals body. Decisions on appeals will remain fully independent. The new body will be staffed by professionally trained adjudicators, with safeguards to ensure high standards. Early legal advice will be a core part of system reforms, avoiding delays and late claims, leading to better decisions.

In Denmark, a separate judicial system operates through the Refugee Appeals Board, where decisions are considered final and generally cannot be challenged in ordinary civil or administrative courts.

Accelerating certain cases. We will accelerate consideration of claims that have a low likelihood of success, ensuring that those who are simply abusing the system, to slow down their inevitable removal, are no longer able to do so.

We will strengthen our approach to dealing with protection and human rights claims that are clearly without merit, so we can move straight to removal without an appeal.

We will legislate to accelerate appeals for removable high-harm cases, foreign national offenders, and others who are detained and readily removable, and prioritise those appeals in the public interest.

¹⁶ Ministry of Justice Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2025, Table FIA_4, published 12 June 2025. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6849a333a271ab34edd1df53/Main_Tables_Q4_2024_25.ods

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025/tribunal-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025#immigration-and-asylum>

A single appeal route. We want to ensure that claimants will have a single appeal. If that appeal is unsuccessful, they will be required to leave the UK.

We will also legislate to enable an expedited appeal for first time late claims where someone is being removed but has not previously made a claim. This will ensure these claims do not suspend removal, as is all too often the case today.

Where a person loses their appeal, they will be expected to leave the country. Where they do not, we will enforce their return.

We will legislate to ensure that if a person does not leave, any further private or family rights accrued after that date will not, other than in the most exceptional cases, override the public interest in favour of removing the person from the UK.

Depending on individual circumstances, financial packages will continue to be available at any stage in the process. This is the most cost-effective approach for UK taxpayers and we will encourage people to take up these opportunities, including by trialling increased incentive payments. Enforced removal will be pursued where they refuse to engage.

Further submissions. We will not send people back to face harm. We must, therefore, consider any “further submissions” raised by failed asylum seekers, prior to their removal, in case their situation has changed. However, this can enable people to extend their time in the UK or frustrate their removal unnecessarily.

The government will introduce new processes to tackle this abuse. Our new appeals body, which includes independent legal advice, will not only be faster but it will require all relevant matters to be dealt with in the single appeal. If people want to go on to make new claims they will be required to demonstrate why the matter is being raised late and that it is substantially different from the initial claim. Where the claimant does not engage and provide evidence, their claim will be disregarded and treated as “withdrawn”.

We are also changing the Immigration Rules so that failed asylum seekers will only be able to apply to stay in the UK if they do so in the same way as everyone else - that means paying relevant fees and evidencing why removal would be contrary to the ECHR. This will close the current loophole that allows failed asylum seekers to make unlimited and free Article 8 claims to slow down their impending removal and prolong their time in the UK.

4. Legal Reform

While some of the barriers to removal are a result of process, others are substantive issues related to the law itself.

A report from the National Audit Office (NAO) showed that 52% of enforced return attempts were cancelled in 2019, a dramatic rise from just 11% in 2013.¹⁸ The NAO noted that this rise was “mostly explained” by asylum claims and human rights challenges which block removal.

Domestic reform to the application of Article 8 of the ECHR. Article 8 of the ECHR is the right to respect for family and private life. Our family Immigration Rules set out the requirements that people must meet to bring family to the UK or to be allowed to stay. Article 8 rights are currently leading to high numbers of arrivals from those who would not otherwise have the right to live in the UK.

Over half of family and private life applications made from within the UK are granted leave on the basis that refusing them would be a breach of Article 8, even though they don't meet the minimum income and English language requirements.¹⁹

Article 8 rights are also used to stop the removal of those who are living here illegally. In January to September 2022, 86% of people who raised rights-based applications, while in detention awaiting removal, were released.²⁰

This is having a significant impact on our ability to enforce the Immigration Rules and control migration

For that reason, we will limit the application of Article 8 on asylum and immigration cases in three ways:

Strengthening the public interest test. Article 8 is a qualified right which means that interferences with it can be justified where it is proportionate to the public interest. We will ensure that the public interest in maintaining effective immigration control, safeguarding our communities from foreign national offenders, promoting economic prosperity, and mitigating pressures on stretched public services are properly balanced with Article 8.

¹⁸ National Audit Office (2020). Immigration enforcement. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Immigration-enforcement.pdf>

¹⁹ Internal Home Office analysis, based on a recent sample of family or private life cases, indicates that in over half of these cases where individuals applied for permission to stay from within the UK, the core requirements (such as financial, English language or relationship) were not met and so these cases were granted on the basis of Article 8. Cases were either granted under exceptional circumstances (the GEN 3.2 test) or one of the Article 8 tests (GEN 3.1, EX1.a or EX1.b tests)

²⁰ Issues raised by people awaiting return, internal Home Office analysis. Figures are for people who were being removed following immigration offences, not FNOs. Includes rights-based applications on other grounds besides Article 8. Available at GOV.UK

Our view is that the balance between the individual's Article 8 rights and the public interest needs to be fundamentally reset to place a much greater emphasis on complying with our Immigration Rules: non-compliance should not be rewarded.

Enforcing the Immigration Rules, including removals, is in the public interest. We will legislate to set out to Home Office decision makers, and the courts, how to properly balance the public interest against individual rights. This intends to narrow the circumstances in which an individual's Article 8 rights would outweigh the public interest in removing them.

Defining family. Family, for the purposes of Article 8, should not normally go beyond immediate family members; unless, for example, other family members are acting in a parental capacity or there is a different, exceptionally close link.

To address this, we will set out, in primary legislation, a definition of family life for the purposes of Article 8. This will set a clear framing for Home Office decision makers and the courts.

Defining how people can make Article 8 applications. People make Article 8 claims from abroad, seeking to come to the UK. For individuals who want to join a family member in the UK, where they do not meet the requirements of the family Immigration Rules, an application will have to be made by their UK-based family member. This is designed to prevent the creeping extension of Article 8 rights to those living overseas.

In-country, we will prescribe how and when Article 8 claims can be made. This will prevent migrants from frustrating removal by making late human rights claims, avoiding fees and relying on the courts to remake Home Office decisions, or in some cases having the courts consider Article 8 claims that have not even been considered by the Home Office.

Article 3 of the ECHR. Article 3 prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Unlike Article 8, Article 3 is an absolute right, which means it cannot be balanced against the public interest.

We agree that people should never be subject to torture. However, the interpretation of "inhuman or degrading treatment" has been expanded over time. As a consequence, we see examples of foreign national offenders who are being allowed to stay in the UK on the basis of an Article 3 protection claim, despite committing serious criminal offences in the UK. Others have blocked a deportation because their healthcare needs, including mental healthcare, cannot be fully met in their country of origin.

To retain public confidence, the ECHR and other instruments must evolve to face modern challenges, and as the Prime Minister has said, the government will seek to do this. We are working with key partner countries over concerns that the interpretation of "inhuman or degrading treatment" has extended in scope, limiting their ability to make sovereign decisions on migration in their own democracies.

Reform to the Modern Slavery System

It is not just international law that limits the removal of illegal migrants. Modern slavery is a barbaric crime that dehumanises people for profit. The government is committed to tackling

it in all its forms and to giving survivors the support and certainty they need to recover. However, there is scope for misuse of this protection by those seeking to block their removal from this country.

More than 2 in 5 people detained for removal between January 2022 and September 2022, were referred as potential victims of modern slavery.²¹ Repeated or late presentation of information, which leads to referrals into the system, can significantly increase the time taken to remove individuals with no right to remain in the UK - even if they are not and have never been - a victim of modern slavery.

Removing reconsiderations for ECHR and ECAT countries. The government has already made a change to statutory guidance to address a critical weakness in the application of the Modern Slavery Act to those within the immigration system. After receiving a negative decision, individuals were able to seek a “reconsideration” of that decision, often just moments before a removal or deportation flight was due to take them out of the country. In September 2025, the Home Secretary removed the “reconsideration” process for migrants due to be removed to a country that is a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT) and the ECHR.

Early presentation of information. Individuals have multiple opportunities to present information relevant to a modern slavery referral, but we continue to see examples of disclosure just moments before a removal flight is scheduled. We will improve screening processes for individuals who are detained for removal from the UK, to ensure they disclose any relevant information, at the earliest possible moment. We will also strengthen guidance for decision makers, to ensure that the failure to disclose information early is taken into account when considering the credibility of an individual’s case.

New modern slavery legislation. We will also introduce new legislation on Modern Slavery, clarifying our obligations and enabling us to address potential misuse while maintaining essential protections.

²¹ Issues raised by people awaiting return, internal Home Office analysis. Figures are for people who were being removed following immigration offences, not FNOs. Available at GOV.UK

5. Other Barriers to Removal

Asylum claims have often been misused to frustrate removal. To preserve asylum for deserving cases, we must robustly defend it by preventing false claims.

Swiftly considering unmeritorious protection claims. We will change our Immigration Rules so that the most egregious protection claims can be considered and refused following a single interview - conducted when the claim is first made. This will target citizens of manifestly safe countries who make unmeritorious protection claims to frustrate their removal.

Where people have entered the UK on a visa and subsequently sought asylum, yet make return journeys to their home country without issue during their stay in the UK, this behaviour will disqualify their claim.

Streamlining deportation of foreign national offenders. Our processes and systems mean that we can miss opportunities to deport foreign national offenders where they are awaiting trial for other more minor offences. We will work with partners across the criminal justice system to ensure we strike the right balance between prosecution and deportation. This builds on reforms in the Sentencing Bill which make foreign national offenders eligible for immediate deportation from the first day of their prison sentence. Our wider reforms on appeals and enforcement will strengthen our ability to deport foreign national offenders.

Improved age assessment. We have recently seen a number of cases where migrants in this country are claiming to be children to prevent their removal. This is often despite having claimed to be an adult upon arrival in the country. Strengthening our approach to age determination is, therefore, vital to block vexatious claims, and ensure we are identifying genuine children who are entitled to support and services.

In the government's Immigration White Paper, published in May 2025, we committed to strengthening the age assessment process. Since then, the Home Office has commissioned trials to identify the most promising scientific and technological methods. This includes exploring how artificial intelligence technology can improve the process. Early assessment suggests that Facial Age Estimation is effective and could produce workable results much quicker than other potential methods, such as bone X-rays or MRI scans, and at a fraction of the cost. In early September 2025, we issued a procurement process to pursue Facial Age Estimation technology.

Part III: Safe and Legal Routes

This statement has set out an approach to asylum policy that seeks to ensure that those who are truly refugees are given sanctuary, while those who are not are discouraged from entering the UK, and are removed should they do so.

It confronts the reality of the world today, where many of those entering the UK are passing through other safe countries to do so. This undermines an important principle that those fleeing persecution seek sanctuary in the first safe country they reach.

The UK retains its responsibility to support those in need. We are still, and always will be, a country that accepts those who are truly fleeing peril. This is the country that has, over the past few years, given refuge to those fleeing the Civil War in Syria, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and honoured its commitments to the people of Hong Kong.

It is vital that we maintain capped routes into the UK for those who need sanctuary and are formally referred for resettlement. That is the right way for refugees to enter the UK and benefit from our protection. Safe and legal routes, with full security checks and controls, have provided a lifeline to some of the world's most vulnerable people. We will continue to do this with a particular focus on refugee sponsorship.

The Immigration White Paper set out that refugee sponsorship would become the framework for most of the UK government's refugee resettlement efforts. There is emerging evidence from around the world that sponsorship can lead to better integration outcomes and at lower cost compared to government supported models of resettlement.

The new model will give greater say to communities and support refugees as they settle, become self-sufficient, and contribute to their local areas. This new model will be based on local capacity to support refugees, and arrival numbers will be tightly controlled by the government. This will not affect our existing commitments.

The process will begin with the Home Secretary setting an annual cap on the number of arrivals that will be accepted through safe and legal routes. This will be based on the capacity and ability of communities to welcome refugees. We will prioritise global resettlement, particularly individuals identified by referral partners such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Communities and institutions in the UK will have a far greater say over who the UK supports.

To achieve this, we will:

- Reform refugee sponsorship to give voluntary and community sector organisations a greater role in resettlement through named sponsorship, within caps set by government.
- Introduce a capped route for refugee and displaced students to study in the UK, helping talented refugees to continue their studies, realise their potential and be able to return to their country and help rebuild it as soon as circumstances allow.
- Establish a capped route for skilled refugees and displaced people to come to the UK for work, building on the experience of the Displaced Talent Mobility Pilot.

Our intention is that those arriving on the reformed resettlement routes will be on the ten-year route to settlement. However, this will be subject to wider consultation.

Collectively, these reforms will enable the UK to support vulnerable people in need of protection, while doing so in a way that is controlled. It provides support to refugees while remaining sustainable for the wider UK population. The reforms will also provide a clear alternative to entering the UK illegally.

Our approach will remain flexible to respond to evolving global crises. We will continue to respond to country situations where it is appropriate to do so. For example, on 1 September 2025, the government announced a 24-month extension to the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme.

We have also made specific arrangements to bring seriously injured children to the UK from the conflict in Gaza for treatment. In addition, we are supporting Chevening scholars and fully funded students in Gaza with university places for the 2025/26 academic year to enable them to travel to the UK and commence their studies. We are now extending this support to dependants of those students who can meet the relevant requirements of the Immigration Rules.

By restoring order and control to our borders we seek to dissuade those from arriving who have no right to be here and remove those who have come illegally. At the same time, we will ensure that there are legal routes open to those who are truly facing peril, and can contribute effectively to our society.

Conclusion

This statement is grounded on an acceptance of the reality that we face in this country and across the world. Global flows of refugees have changed. More people than ever are fleeing persecution. But equally, many are choosing the country where they seek asylum, rather than stopping at the first point of safety. Others are seeking asylum in countries where they have no real claim, dressing economic migration up as asylum.

The UK has become a particularly appealing location. In part, this is because of the comparative generosity of our asylum offer and the accessibility of the illegal economy. But it is also because this country has found it so hard to remove those who have no right to be here, whether that is because of a clogged-up asylum processing system, a legal framework that makes frustrating a removal easy, or because of a reluctance to remove certain groups or remove people to certain countries.

In light of this challenge, this statement presents what may be the most substantial reform to the UK's asylum system in a generation. It transforms the nature of the protection we afford to refugees, ensuring that the UK is no longer an outlier that draws flows of migrants across Europe. The policies in this statement also strike a new posture on removals, speeding up the process, tackling the thicket of legal precedent that now frustrates so many removals, sanctioning countries who refuse to play by the rules, and taking a more forthright attitude to returning those who have no right to be here.

This statement also reaffirms that this country will provide refuge to those fleeing danger, provided it is controlled, safe and legal.

Most importantly, it represents the position of the government - that only by restoring order to our borders, can we be the open, tolerant and generous country that we know ourselves to be.

Appendix

The full set of reforms set out in this statement are as follows:

PART I: Reducing Arrivals

1. Core Protection for Refugees

- **New Core Protection Offer:** Refugee support will be limited to what is required by international obligations, moving away from permanent protection.
- **Shortened Leave to Remain:** Initial leave reduced from five years to 30 months, renewable only if protection is still needed.
- **Longer Path to Settlement:** No indefinite settled status until 20 years in the UK, with requirements to be set in a future consultation.
- **Protection “Work and Study” Route:** Refugees can switch to this route if they obtain employment or commence study, making them eligible for earlier settlement and family sponsorship.
- **No Automatic Family Reunion:** Family reunion rights will not be automatic for those on Core Protection; stricter requirements will apply.
- **Reduced Right to Public Funds:** Access to taxpayer-funded benefits will be prioritised for those making an economic contribution; a consultation is planned for 2026.
- **Special Consideration for Vulnerable Groups:** Pathways for unaccompanied children, families with children, and other vulnerable asylum seekers will be reviewed.

2. Asylum Support and Accommodation

- **Revoking Duty to Support:** The legal obligation to provide support to destitute asylum seekers will be replaced with a discretionary power.
- **Conditional Support:** Support will be denied to those with the right to work, those who have made themselves intentionally destitute, or those not complying with support conditions (e.g., failing to abide by removal directions or working illegally).
- **Compliance-Based Support:** Support will be conditional on compliance with UK law, including sanctions for criminality, refusal to relocate, or disruptive conduct.
- **Contributions Mechanism:** Those with some assets or income will be required to contribute to the cost of their support.
- **Ending Hotel Accommodation:** Commitment to exit all asylum hotels by the end of Parliament, moving towards large sites (including military sites).

3. Tackling Illegal Working

- **Increased Enforcement:** Record levels of raids and penalties for employers hiring illegal workers.

- **Expanded Right-to-Work Checks:** Checks will be extended to gig economy, sub-contracted, and self-employed workers.
- **Digital ID Requirement:** A single digital ID will be mandatory for right-to-work checks by the end of Parliament.
- **Collaboration with Online Platforms:** Agreements with delivery companies to strengthen ID verification and data sharing.

PART II: Increasing Removals

1. Removing Failed Asylum Seekers

- **Resuming Removals to More Countries:** Exploring enforced returns to countries like Syria where conditions have changed.
- **Family Removals:** Financial support for voluntary family returns, with escalation to enforced removal if refused.
- **Ending Indefinite Support for Families:** Consultation on removing support from families who do not cooperate with returns, using powers in the Immigration Act 2016.
- **Return Hubs:** Continue to explore the use of “return hubs” - which are safe third countries that failed asylum seekers can be sent to instead of their country of origin.

2. Visa Penalties

- **Imposing Visa Penalties:** Sanctions (including suspending visas) on countries that do not cooperate with the return of their citizens.

3. Appeals and Legal Reform

- **New Appeals Body:** Creation of an independent appeals body with professionally trained adjudicators.
- **Accelerated and Single Appeal Route:** Statutory timelines, expedited appeals for certain cases, and a single appeal route to reduce delays and abuse.
- **Strengthened Certification Regime:** Denying appeal rights for clearly unmeritorious claims.
- **Legislation on Post-Appeal Rights:** Private or family life rights accrued after losing an appeal will not override removal other than in the most exceptional circumstances.
- **Assisted Voluntary Return:** Continued offer of financial packages for voluntary return at any stage.
- **Tackling Further Submissions Abuse:** New processes for further submissions; limiting further submissions to protection grounds only.
- **Legal advice:** Early legal advice will be a core part of system reforms, avoiding delays and late claims.

4. Human Rights and Modern Slavery Reform

- **Limiting Article 8 Claims:** Legislation to rebalance the public interest test, define family life, and clarify application routes for Article 8 (right to family/private life) claims.
- **International Reform to the application Article 3:** Working with partners to reform the application of the ECHR's prohibition on inhuman or degrading treatment.
- **Modern Slavery System Reform:** Legislation to clarify our responsibilities under international law, Removal of "reconsideration" for negative decisions, enhanced screening for individuals detained for removal, and a stronger link between timely disclosure and credibility.

5. Other Barriers to Removal

- **Swift Refusal of Unmeritorious Claims:** Single-interview refusals for manifestly safe country claims.
- **Streamlined Deportation of Foreign Offenders:** Immediate deportation eligibility after sentencing.
- **Improved Age Assessment:** Trials of AI and facial age estimation technology.

PART III: Safe and Legal Routes

- **Annual Cap on Arrivals:** Home Secretary to set an annual cap on arrivals through safe and legal routes, based on community capacity.
- **Reformed Resettlement and Sponsorship:** Shift to community sponsorship as the main framework for refugee resettlement, with greater local and voluntary sector involvement.
- **Capped Routes for Students and Skilled Refugees:** New capped routes for refugee/displaced students and skilled refugees to come to the UK for study or work.
- **Flexibility for Global Crises:** Continued responsiveness to country-specific crises (e.g., Ukraine, Gaza), including support for dependants of Chevening scholars and fully funded students.

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