

Home Secretary's statement on the New Plan for Immigration

Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on our New Plan for Immigration.

The government has taken back control of legal immigration by ending free movement and introducing a points-based immigration system.

We are now addressing the challenge of illegal immigration – head on.

I am introducing the most significant overhaul of our asylum system in decades.

A new, comprehensive, fair but firm, long-term plan.

Because while people are dying, we have a responsibility to act.

People are dying – at sea, in lorries and in shipping containers – having put their lives in the hands of criminal gangs that facilitate illegal journeys to the UK.

To stop the deaths, we must stop the trade in people that cause them.

Our society is enriched by legal immigration.

We celebrate those who have come to the UK lawfully and helped build Britain. We always will.

Since 2015, we have resettled almost 25,000 men, women and children seeking refuge from persecution across the world – more than any EU country.

Welcomed more than 29,000 close relatives through refugee family reunion.

And created a pathway to citizenship to enable over five million people in Hong Kong to come to the UK.

Nobody can say that the British public are not fair or generous when it comes to helping those in need.

But the British public also recognise that for too long parts of the immigration system have been open to abuse.

At the heart of our New Plan for Immigration is a simple principle: fairness.

Access to the UK's asylum system should be based on need, not the ability to pay people smugglers.

If you enter illegally from a safe country like France where you should and could have claimed asylum, you are not seeking refuge from persecution – as is the intended purpose of the asylum system.

Instead, you are choosing the UK as your preferred destination.

And you are doing so at the expense of those with nowhere else to go.

Our system is collapsing under the pressure of parallel illegal routes to asylum, facilitated by criminal smugglers.

The existence of parallel routes is deeply unfair, advancing those with the means to pay smugglers over those in desperate need.

The capacity of our asylum system is not unlimited.

And so the presence of economic migrants which these illegal routes introduce, limits our ability to properly support others in genuine need of protection.

This is manifestly unfair to those desperately waiting to be resettled in the UK.

And it is not fair to the British people either; whose taxes pay for vital public services and an asylum system which has skyrocketed in cost – now costing over 1 billion pounds this year.

There were more than 32,000 attempts tried to enter the UK illegally in 2019.

With 8,500 people arriving by small boat in 2020.

Of those, 87% were men, 74% were aged between 18-39.

We should ask ourselves, where are the vulnerable women and children that this system should exist to protect?

The system is becoming overwhelmed – 109,000 claims are sitting in the asylum queue – 52,000 awaiting an initial asylum decision. Almost three quarters of those waiting a year or more.

42,000 failed asylum seekers have not left the country, despite having their claim refused.

The persistent failure to enforce our immigration laws, with a system that is open to gaming by economic migrants and exploitation by criminals, is eroding public trust, and disadvantaging vulnerable people who need our help.

Which is why our New Plan for Immigration is driven by three fair but firm objectives:

First. To increase the fairness of our system so we can protect and support those in genuine need of asylum.

Second. To deter illegal entry into the UK – breaking the business model of people smugglers – and protecting the lives of those they endanger.

Third. To remove more easily from the UK, those with no right to be here.

Let me take each in turn, Mr Speaker.

First. We will continue to provide safe refuge to those in need – strengthening support for those arriving through safe and legal routes.

People coming to the UK through resettlement routes will be granted indefinite leave to remain.

They will receive more support to learn English, find work and integrate.

And I will also act to help those who have suffered injustices.

By amending British Nationality Law so that members of the Windrush Generation will be able to obtain British citizenship more easily.

Second. This plan marks a step change in our approach as we toughen our stance to deter illegal entry and the criminals that endanger life by enabling it.

Many illegal arrivals have travelled through a safe country like France to get to the UK – where they could and should have claimed asylum.

We must act to reduce the pull factors of our system and disincentivise illegal entry.

For the first time, whether people enter the UK legally or illegally will have an impact on how their asylum claim progresses, and on their status in the UK if that claim is successful.

We will deem their claim as inadmissible, and make every effort to remove those who enter the UK illegally having travelled through a safe country first in which they could and should have claimed asylum.

Only where removal is not possible, will those who have successful claims – having entered illegally – receive a new temporary protection status.

This is not an automatic right to settle, they will be regularly reassessed for removal, and will include limited access to benefits, and limited family reunion rights. Our tough new stance will also include:

New maximum life sentences for people smugglers and facilitators.

New rules to stop unscrupulous people posing as children.

And strengthen enforcement powers for Border Force.

Third. We will seek to rapidly remove those with no right to be here in the UK.

Establishing a fast-track appeals process.

Streamlining the appeals system and making quicker removal decisions for failed asylum seekers and dangerous foreign criminals.

We will tackle the practice of meritless claims which clog up the courts with last minute claims and appeals.

A fundamental unfairness that lawyers tell me frustrates them too.

Because for too long our justice system has been gamed.

Almost three quarters of migrants in detention raised last-minute new claims, challenges or other issues with over eight in ten of these eventually being denied as valid reasons to stay in the UK.

Enough is enough.

Our new plan sets out a 'one-stop' process to require all claims to be made upfront.

No more endless meritless claims to frustrate removal. No more stalling justice.

Our new system will be faster and fairer and will help us better support the most vulnerable.

Mr Speaker, our new plan builds on the work already done to take back control of our borders.

Building a system that upholds our reputation as a country where criminality is not rewarded, but which is a haven for those in need.

There are no quick fixes, or shortcuts to success.

But this long-term plan, pursued doggedly, will fix our broken system.

We know that members of the Opposition would prefer a different plan, one that embraces the idea of Open Borders.

Many of them were reluctant to end Free Movement.

With members opposite on record as having said that all immigration controls are racist or sexist.

And to those who say we lack compassion, I simply say, while people are dying we must act to deter these journeys.

And if you don't like our plan, where is yours?

This government promised to take a common-sense approach to controlling immigration – legal and illegal – and we will deliver on that promise.

The UK is playing its part to tackle the inhumanity of illegal migration, and today I will press for global action at the G6.

I commend this statement to the House