

Launch of new academic and practitioner network to tackle extremism

News story

The Commission for Countering Extremism has launched a pilot network bringing together experts in counter-extremism to help align policy, practice and research.



This was set up as the Commission for Countering Extremism recognises the importance of drawing on and disseminating existing evidence as well as expanding the evidence base, which will help to further support counter-extremism work. The new network will also help to identify gaps in our understanding of extremism and counter-extremism and seek to support future research.

The Academic-Practitioner Counter Extremism Network (APCEN) is made up of members from:

- the Commission for Countering Extremism
- national, regional and local government practitioners working in counter-extremism
- leading academics

The first meeting focused on the relationship between extremism and conspiracy theories, and included a presentation from Professor Paul Gill on conspiracy beliefs and violent extremist intentions.

The group will meet 6 times a year. Academic membership is independent and non-partisan, providing the opportunity for members to have open, honest and frank discussions about counter-extremism work.

The list of independent academic members and links to their profiles are below. They are not additional commissioners, they are independent academics free to express their own views, based on their experience and expertise.

They will not be held responsible for decisions made by the Lead Commissioner or the Commission.

Published 5 November 2020

[Germany and Sweden removed from travel corridor list of exempt countries](#)

- new national restrictions introduced today (5 November 2020) mean it's no longer permitted to travel for holidays, with those in breach of the rules facing penalties starting at £200 and rising to a maximum of £6,400
- inbound international travel will continue to be governed by the travel corridor approach; must also follow the UK's domestic regulations
- Germany and Sweden have been removed from the list of UK travel corridors having been assessed by the Joint Biosecurity Centre as posing a heightened infection risk

Passengers arriving into the UK from Germany and Sweden from 4am on Saturday 7 November 2020 will need to self-isolate for 2 weeks before then following domestic rules, as [travel corridors](#) continue to be used to protect the nation from imported cases of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The government's travel corridor policy remains a critical part of the government's COVID-19 response as it mitigates the risk of importing infections from abroad; this has not changed following the introduction of [new restrictions in England](#).

Anyone arriving into the UK from all destinations on the government's travel corridor list will need to abide by all applicable domestic rules. Passengers travelling from a non-exempt country, territory or region would still be required to [self-isolate](#) for 2 weeks.

In England, everyone must stay at home, and may leave only for a very limited set of reasons, [including for work or education](#). This means people can no longer travel to take holidays, or travel internationally – unless for work or other legally permitted reasons. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has updated its [travel advice](#) to reflect this.

Fixed penalties starting at £200 will be given to those found not following the rules, but these fines will double for subsequent offences, up to a maximum of £6,400.

Germany and Sweden have been removed from the government's travel corridor list following an increase in confirmed cases of coronavirus. Data from the

Joint Biosecurity Centre and Public Health England has indicated a significant change in both the level and pace of confirmed cases of coronavirus in both destinations, leading to ministers removing these from the current list of travel corridors.

There has been a consistent increase in COVID-19 cases per 100,000 of the population in Germany over the past 4 weeks, with a 75% increase in total cases over this time period. In Sweden, new cases per week have increased by 34% over the same time period.

A range of factors are taken into account when deciding to remove a country from the exemption list, including the continued increase of coronavirus within a country, the numbers of new cases, information on a country's testing capacity, testing regime and test positivity rate and potential trajectory of the disease in the coming weeks.

People currently in [Germany](#) and [Sweden](#) are encouraged to finish their trip as usual, following the local rules and checking the FCD0 travel advice pages for further information.

All travellers, including those from exempt destinations, will still be required to show a complete [passenger locator form](#) on arrival into the UK unless they fall into a small group of exemptions. This is critical in being able to track the virus in case of any local outbreaks.

Penalties for those breaching the self-isolation rules when travelling from non-exempt countries are £1,000 for first breach, with increased penalties for subsequent breaches, up to £10,000. These penalties mirror penalties for those breaching self-isolation following a positive COVID-19 test or contact from Test and Trace.

[Biggest ever nationwide initiative to restore nature in England set for launch](#)

In the first of its kind, an England-wide initiative was launched today (5 November) and will recover nature across the length and breadth of the country, and help everybody access and enjoy it.

The Nature Recovery Network (NRN) Delivery Partnership, led by Natural England, brings together representatives from over 600 organisations to drive forward the restoration of protected sites and landscapes and help provide at least 500,000 hectares of new wildlife-rich habitat across England from doorstep to landscape, as set out in the government's 25 Year Environment Plan. The Network will link together our very best nature rich places,

restore landscapes in towns and the countryside and create new habitats for everybody to enjoy. It is the biggest initiative to restore nature ever to be launched in England.

The partners, including the Council for Sustainable Business, Wildlife and Countryside Link, National Parks England, RSPB and the Country Land and Business Association, alongside Defra, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission, will be providing a wide range of support including funding and land to be restored. Today Natural England is calling for even more organisations to be part of the initiative, organisations already giving their support include Coca-Cola, Network Rail and Severn Trent Water.

As well as making sure our existing protected sites are in the best possible condition, the Nature Recovery Network programme will recover threatened animal and plant species and create and connect new green and blue spaces such as wetlands, ponds, meadows, woodlands, and peatlands. It will engage conservation rangers and environmentally focused community-based projects and put lost features like hedgerows and trees back into our landscapes. These restored habitats will help address climate change through capturing carbon, while improving the quality of our air, water, and soil, and provide natural flood protection. They will also provide us all with places to enjoy and connect with nature and helping to improve our health and wellbeing.

The Nature Recovery Network will:

- Restore 75% of protected sites to favourable condition so nature can thrive.
- Create or restore at least 500,000 additional hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside of protected sites.
- Recover our threatened and iconic animal and plant species by providing more habitat and wildlife corridors to help species move in response to climate change.
- Support the planting of 180,000 ha of woodland.
- Deliver a range of wider benefits, including carbon capture, flood management, clean water, pollination and recreation.
- Bring nature much closer to people, where they live, work, and play, boosting health and wellbeing.

As part of the Nature Recovery Network, the government is exploring the creation of large scale nature recovery areas to significantly expand wildlife habitat and deliver wide ranging benefits. This visionary approach to restoring nature was recently demonstrated by Natural England with seven leading partners designating the first ever 'super' National Nature Reserve (NNR) at [Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve in Dorset](#). The super NNR – which is the size of Blackpool – knits together 11 types of priority habitat across the landscape, giving rare and varied wildlife, including the sand lizard, the Dartford warbler, and the silver studded blue butterfly, a better chance of adapting and thriving in light of the current climate crisis. It also provides enhanced experience for 2.5m people who visit Purbeck every year.

The ambitious plans were launched in a virtual conference, where Chair Tony

Juniper and CEO Marian Spain called for even more organisations, businesses, and charities to pledge to take action to help deliver the Nature Recovery Network.

Launching the Nature Recovery Network initiative, Natural England chair Tony Juniper said:

We are firing the starting gun on England's Nature Recovery Network, backed by the biggest ever collaboration between government, business and charities to drive forward the biggest programme for nature recovery in England's history. The natural world upon which we all depend has for far too long been in decline, and now is the moment when we must change our approach, to move beyond preserving what little remains and to embark on restoration at scale.

Achieving nature recovery is a complex task that can only be realised through partnerships. These are needed to bring together the people who manage land and sea, the different sources of investment and knowledge that we need to make progress, the variety of official policies we have, and to make the most of the passion of the many leaders who are ready to step up to deliver action on the ground. Our vision is for that network of organisations and people to create a network of places that will bring huge benefits for wildlife, landscapes and people. It is an ambitious idea, but the fact is that in different parts of the country it's already happening, and we should take great encouragement from that.

International Environment Minister Lord Goldsmith, also speaking at the event, said:

Our country's rich biodiversity and ecosystems are under threat, and that is true all around the world. Last month at the UN, seventy five leaders registered their support for our ambitious Leader's Pledge for Nature to put nature and biodiversity on the road to recovery by 2030. Our duty now is to turn those words into meaningful action.

I am thrilled that we are launching a partnership to help deliver the biggest nature recovery project in England's history, which will restore our depleted ecosystems and habitats as we continue to build back greener.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow, speaking about the launch of the partnership, said:

Delivering a Nature Recovery Network is fundamental for achieving our goals for nature – enhancing the quality of our existing areas for nature, restoring and creating new habitats, and linking all of these together. It is only with bigger, better, well-connected habitats that we can recover our beloved species and address the greatest challenges we face – from climate change to declines in mental health.

We cannot deliver the Nature Recovery Network alone. We are providing new legislation, tools and funding, but it is together that we will deliver the network of wildlife-rich places that allow nature and people to flourish

Mark Bridgeman, President of the Country Land and Business Association, speaking about the launch of the partnership, said:

As a partner of the Nature Recovery Network Partnership we recognise there is no time to lose. The public can see the impact of biodiversity loss and climate change with their own eyes, and quite rightly they expect us to act.

As stewards of the countryside, landowners are uniquely placed to deliver meaningful programmes that will drive environmental recovery, and we are determined to play our part in meeting the challenges ahead.

Liz Lowe, Head of Sustainability at Coca-Cola Great Britain, speaking about the launch of the partnership, said:

We welcome the launch of the Nature Recovery Network, especially as this exciting new partnership will help encourage more businesses to understand and play their part in the active restoration of nature and to invest in it for the long-term: without thriving natural ecosystems, we can't have thriving businesses and communities.

Emma Marsh, Director, RSPB England, speaking about the launch of the partnership, said:

This is a once in a generation opportunity to make a step-change in how we protect nature in England. The public wants this. The experience, skills, and ambition are there. We all stand ready to play our part to level up and deliver a wildlife-rich country for the benefit of all. Together, we can leave the natural world in a

better condition than we inherited.

The Nature Recovery Network is a major commitment in the government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#). It is underpinned by '[Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#)' (LNRS), established through our landmark [Environment Bill](#), which will provide the spatial mapping and planning tools to inform nature recovery. Additional funding of over £650m, including the government's [Green Recovery Challenge Fund](#) and Nature for Climate Fund will help drive the Nature Recovery Network forward.

Earlier this year Natural England and Defra announced that five local authorities will receive a share of a £1 million fund to pilot how LNRS can drive the recovery of England's landscapes and wildlife locally.

The Nature Recovery Network will also be key to England's recovery from coronavirus. The [Natural England people survey](#) revealed that the nation's gardens, parks, woodlands and rivers have played a huge part in helping maintain their mental health during the coronavirus pandemic, with almost nine in ten adults in England reporting that access to nature boosts their mood.

Further information

- To express an interest in becoming a Nature Recovery Network Delivery Partner, contact Natural England's Nature Recovery Network partnership team: NDPNaturerecovery@naturalengland.org.uk. We will then organise a meeting to discuss your contribution to the Nature Recovery Network.
- Further quotes from partners, additional case studies and social media videos are available on the Nature Recovery Network via [this Dropbox link](#). Our 6 minute case study video will be made available on request after 14:00 on Thursday 5th November.

[Moscow Mechanism report on Belarus: UK statement](#)

Thank you Mr Chair for giving me the floor.

I would like to welcome Professor Wolfgang Benedek to the Permanent Council today and thank him for the meticulous and professional approach he has shown in preparing this report concerning human rights violations in Belarus.

I also welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue with you today.

It is no secret that the UK was a vocal proponent of invoking the mechanism. We did so because of our profound concerns regarding the deeply flawed

Presidential election in Belarus, and the grisly repression that followed. Professor Benedek's report shows all too clearly that our concerns were justified.

It is a comprehensive, well-substantiated and objective report. The evidence presented is stark and disturbing. The conclusions are clear. To quote Professor Benedek himself: "There is overwhelming evidence that the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 have been falsified and that massive and systematic human rights violations have been committed by the Belarusian security forces in response to peaceful protests and demonstrations."

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the brave individuals and civil society organisations who have made this report possible through their testimonies and submissions. They work tirelessly to defend human rights and to hold governments accountable for their actions. For this, we are grateful.

Mr Chair, Professor Benedek's report shows that every aspect of the election fell short of Belarus's international commitments. It confirms the widely held view that the elections were not transparent, free or fair. As my government has made clear, Lukashenko's claim to be President on the basis of the 9 August elections lacks legitimacy. The people of Belarus are entitled to free and fair elections and to decide on the future direction of their country.

The report finds that the allegations of human rights violations have been proven beyond doubt. The list is long and disturbing. Children separated from their mothers. Men and women, some as young as 15, beaten and subjected to physical and psychological torture. And all of this at the hands of Belarusian security forces. Alongside its partners, the UK has sanctioned some of those responsible.

As striking as the violations themselves are is the environment of impunity in which they were conducted. The evidence is there for all of us to see, on our TV screens, in our newspapers, across social media. Yet no one has been held accountable for the well documented allegations of torture and cruel, degrading or inhumane treatment by the Belarusian authorities.

Mr Chair, This climate of impunity has helped perpetuate a cycle of violence against journalists and the media – a community which Professor Benedek's report shows has come under sustained attack. The Belarusian authorities have sought to hide their actions, by shutting down the internet, by arresting and harassing journalists, confiscating and breaking equipment and forcing media organisations into ever more complex methods of accreditation. The ability of journalists to work freely is fundamental to a functioning democracy. In the week that we mark the 7th international day to end impunity for crimes against journalists, I call on the Belarusian authorities to hold to account those who seek to harm journalists or restrict their ability to work.

Mr Chair, The appalling catalogue of violations evidenced in the report are not isolated incidents or events in the past. The Belarusian authorities continue to perpetrate a campaign of violence, coercion and intimidation

against its own people. Reports state that over 16,000 people have been arrested or detained. Opposition figures remain imprisoned on false, politically motivated charges.

The Belarusian authorities have shown no intention of opening meaningful dialogue with Belarusian society. Instead they deploy ever more brutal actions against their people, using stun grenades and firing rubber bullets against the crowds. As recently as this weekend, Alexander Lukashenko threatened to leave protestors "without hands" should they touch a policeman.

Mr Chair, A solution must be found to this crisis. Crucially, it must be one which recognises and respects the democratic rights of the people of Belarus to determine their future and how they are governed. We are grateful therefore to Professor Benedek for his recommendations on how we can find a peaceful end to the current situation.

The report makes 82 recommendations of the Belarusian authorities, including new Presidential elections, an immediate end to the violence and release of all those illegally detained, an independent oversight mechanism on detention conditions, and an investigation into all allegations of torture.

The report also makes recommendations to the international community, including non-recognition of the election results, a request for fresh elections, granting asylum in cases of persecution and for an in-depth investigation of human rights violations. The UK supports these recommendations.

The Moscow Mechanism is a cooperative tool. It provides the basis for discussion and action, in the spirit of the OSCE as a forum for meaningful dialogue. The UK is disappointed therefore that the Belarusian authorities refused to engage constructively with the Rapporteur or allow him entry to the country. I urge the Belarusian authorities to reconsider their approach, and to take the opportunity Professor Benedek's report represents to work with the international community towards our shared goal of a democratic, prosperous Belarus.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

Moscow Mechanism report on Belarus: joint statement

Mr Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the following delegations who, acting together, on 17 September invoked the Moscow Mechanism in relation to concerns centring around reports of serious human rights violations and

abuses in Belarus: Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

On behalf of the invoking States I wish to thank Professor Wolfgang Benedek for his work as Rapporteur under the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism – we are most grateful for your professional and meticulous approach to your mandate and for the substantial report which you have produced. Your professional integrity and dedication to human rights and fundamental freedoms are apparent in your report. I hope that all 57 participating States to the OSCE will do justice to your report by considering carefully your findings, and recommendations, which are addressed not only to Belarus but also to OSCE participating States and the wider International Community.

Mr Chair,

We invoked the Moscow Mechanism because we identified the situation in Belarus as a particularly serious threat to the fulfillment of the provisions of the OSCE human dimension as set out in various documents. The mandate provided was substantial, reflecting the scope and severity of the alleged human rights violations and abuses.

It is clear from the report that we were right to be concerned. The report is based on extensive documentation, including reports, testimonials by victims and eyewitnesses, official information and reports by the authorities. It concludes the facts are overwhelming: that the 9 August 2020 Presidential election results were fraudulent and that sustained and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms have been committed by the Belarusian security forces of the Lukashenka regime.

Peaceful protestors have been met with brutal force from the Belarusian police and other security forces. People have been arbitrarily detained on political charges, and imprisoned before and after the elections. The freedom of the media and the safety of journalists and media workers, from both local and international media, have been under sustained attack. The Belarusian security forces have operated with general impunity despite numerous credible reports of abuse.

This independent report reveals evidence of the Belarusian authorities acting with excessive violence, and confirms their involvement in torture and other ill-treatment as well as enforced disappearances.

Professor Benedek cites numerous instances of reported human rights violations, with first hand reports of detainees, some as young as 15, being subjected to physical and psychological torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings, rape and threats of rape, and electric shocks, as well as reports of their being held in cramped detention conditions and denied food and drink for prolonged periods.

The report notes that not a single investigation has been opened or a single official suspended in response to what the report terms "systemic torture and ill treatment" designed to "punish demonstrators". The report also draws

attention to the intimidation of women activists with the threat of removal of their children.

It is noticeable that the report draws on the testimony of numerous individuals including human rights defenders, journalists and members of civil society in Belarus. We are grateful to all who contributed information for this extensive report. In revealing what has been happening inside Belarus, they have demonstrated incredible bravery and fortitude, and are deserving of our praise and support.

Their testimonies are stark reminders of the backdrop to the current crisis – the Presidential election on 9 August which was neither free nor fair; and the attempts by the Belarusian people, across all walks of life, to peacefully protest against that fraudulent election and the repression that followed. Those peaceful actions have been met with brutality and restrictions on peaceful assembly, media freedom and freedom of expression.

Mr Chair,

In addition to providing an independent report on the facts, Professor Benedek has offered a series of recommendations addressed to the Belarusian authorities, to the international community and to OSCE participating States. We welcome those recommendations and look forward to discussions in the OSCE and elsewhere, in the weeks ahead.

We highlight as particularly noteworthy the following recommendations. The Belarusian authorities should:

- “cancel the results of the presidential elections of 9 August 2020 due to irregularities at all stages of the process” and “organize new genuine presidential elections based on international standards”, inviting OSCE/ODIHR observation as well as other international and domestic observers
- bring the electoral law into conformity with “international standards as recommended by OSCE/ODIHR and the United Nations”
- immediately cease all violence, in particular torture and ill-treatment against peaceful protestors and opponents
- release immediately and unconditionally all prisoners held for political reasons and refrain from judicial harassment and reprisals
- ensure standards of fair trial are respected
- ensure the right of peaceful assembly in line with international standards
- ensure the safety of all journalists and provide an enabling environment for the work of journalists and the media
- refrain from interference with the access to the Internet, and terminate censorship and blocking of webpages
- ensure an independent and impartial body promptly investigates allegations of torture, ill-treatment, sexual violence, disappearance and killing by security forces

The first step towards progress must be for the Belarusian authorities to cease their campaign of violence against peaceful protestors, release all

those unjustly imprisoned and hold perpetrators to account. The impunity must end.

Mr Chair,

The OSCE's Moscow Mechanism was established by consensus and in good faith by all participating States. It provides an opportunity for an independent examination of alleged serious human rights violations in a participating State. Reports under the Mechanism should provide the basis for discussion and action, in the spirit of the OSCE as a forum for meaningful dialogue.

We therefore remain deeply disappointed by the refusal by the Belarusian authorities to engage with the Rapporteur and the Moscow Mechanism. We urge the Belarusian authorities to reconsider their approach, engage with the process at today's Permanent Council and in the future, and also cooperate with other ongoing international mandates, such as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Belarus.

The Belarusian authorities should seek a peaceful and democratic solution to the current crisis, and engage in an open and inclusive dialogue with broader society. We urge the Belarusian authorities to again consider accepting the Chairperson-in-Office's offer to facilitate a national dialogue between the Belarusian authorities and representatives of the opposition and civil society.

We welcome the recommendations to OSCE participating States and to the International Community. As invoking States we recognize it is our future duty – together with other participating States – to help the OSCE monitor in Belarus “the establishment of human rights, democracy and the rule of law” based on the Rapporteur's recommendations.

For those recommendations, and the full content of the report, I must, again, offer our sincere thanks to Professor Benedek.

Thank you.