



TOGETHER WITH REFUGEES

Background media briefing

About Together With Refugees

Together With Refugees is a growing coalition of more than 200 national and local organisations who believe in showing compassion to refugees fleeing war and persecution. It is calling for a more effective, fair and humane approach to the UK's refugee system that:

- allows people to have a fair and efficient hearing for their claim for protection, no matter how they came here;
- ensures people can live in dignity in communities while they wait to find out if they will be granted protection; and
- enables refugees to rebuild their lives and make valuable contributions to their communities.

1) The New Plan for Immigration and forthcoming Borders Bill: overview

- At the Conservative Party Conference last year, the Home Secretary [announced](#) that she would, “bring forward legislation to overhaul our broken asylum system”. The government released its [New Plan for Immigration](#) (NPI) proposals on 24 March 2021, with a 6 May deadline for consultation responses.
- In the Queen's Speech, the government promised legislation to enact key elements of the plan (other parts will not require primary legislation).
- The Borders Bill (its current working title) is currently expected to be introduced to Parliament in late June or early July before the summer recess, with its passage set to resume in the autumn, perhaps running through to early next year.

2) Context: Problems with the current system

- There is little doubt that important changes are needed to the UK's asylum system. There is a lack of safe ways for refugees and people seeking asylum to reach the UK. When people do arrive, they increasingly wait more than a year for a decision on their claim for asylum. And during this time, people are often housed in inappropriate and unsafe accommodation without the support they need.

- According to Home Office statistics:
 - Of the 64,895 people waiting for an initial decision on their asylum application, 72% have been waiting more than six months.
 - There has been a 60% increase in the numbers of people waiting six months or more for an initial decision compared to December 2019, and this has nearly tripled in the last two years.
 - There was an 8% drop in asylum applications in the year ending September 2020.
- A government pledge to fix a broken system and the Borders Bill should be an opportunity to create an effective, fair and compassionate asylum system that works for the taxpayer, communities and those seeking asylum by:
 - Expanding safe routes for people to reach the UK;
 - Improving asylum decision-making to ensure decisions are made quickly and are right first time;
 - Providing the right support to people, at the right time, so that they can engage with the asylum system and integrate successfully.

However, many refugee groups are deeply concerned that not only will the government's proposed approach fail to solve the current problems within the asylum system but will compound them further. They warn it would mean a person's application for asylum and the protection they receive will be determined not by the dangers they are fleeing, but by how they entered the country – and that the measures will radically diminish the UK's overall commitment to protecting refugees.

3) Some key areas of concern with the NPI proposals and expected provisions of the Borders Bill

- A. **The NPI proposals threaten to create a two-tier system in which many people's ability to receive refugee protection in the UK will be determined not by the dangers they are fleeing, but by how they entered the country.** This will further undermine the ability of those people who have no choice but to use irregular means, such as lorry or boat, to reach the UK to make their claim for asylum; a path recognised as legitimate under international law despite it often being branded 'illegal'.

Under proposed new rules, those people entering by such means would be made inadmissible for refugee status – and returned to 'safe third countries'. (At least in theory – as this will require agreements with such nations to be in place, which currently do not exist and will be hard to secure.) If people cannot be returned, they will be given a new 'temporary protection status'; with the power to move them off-shore potentially in the Bill too. This would mean such people do not have an automatic right to settle, with leave granted for a maximum period of 30 months, and they

will be regularly reassessed for removal from the UK. They will also have limited family reunion rights and possibly more limited access to financial support. The government claims, despite research evidence to the contrary, that this will deter and reduce the number of people arriving through irregular means.

- B. In presenting its NPI proposals, the government has claimed, instead, it wants to expand safe routes for refugees to come to the UK - but has provided few clear commitments on how this will happen.** While there is a commitment to continue to provide resettlement places, no new concrete target for how many people will be able to come to the UK has been set out. In addition, the NPI proposes to close off other existing safe routes for refugees to come to the UK. For example, it proposes to limit access to family reunion for many people granted refugee status, which could potentially significantly reduce the number of families able to safely reunite. The Borders Bill could be an important opportunity to introduce new safe routes, such as humanitarian visas, to allow people to come to the UK through a controlled route before having their application for asylum processed. These visas can be an efficient and individualised way to grant access to protection for people who may otherwise face dangerous journeys.
- C. Providing the right support for people waiting for a decision on their application for asylum should be a core part of a compassionate and fair system – and yet the NPI proposals threaten to deepen the problems people already face in this area.** An increasing number of people seeking asylum in the UK are living in accommodation for months, and even years, that falls far short of basic requirements. Far from addressing these issues, the Borders Bill is likely to include powers to house people seeking asylum in new reception centres. As the deep problems seen in the recent use of ex-military barracks show, institutional-style accommodation can have significant negative impacts on people's mental and physical health, as well as isolating them from wider communities, ultimately reducing social integration and cohesion. A more compassionate and effective asylum system would give people accommodation and support within communities where they can make connections, have access to essential services and contribute to their local community.

Further sources

- Asylum Matters [briefing](#) on how to respond to the NPI consultation
- British Red Cross, [Far from a home: why asylum accommodation needs reform report](#)
- Freedom From Torture, [Everything you need to know about Priti Patel's 'New Plan' for Immigration](#)
- Refugee Action, [Fair and Effective: A Vision for the Asylum System](#)

- Refugee Council, [Parliamentary Briefing on the NPI, April 2021](#)
- Scottish Refugee Council, [Consultation Response](#)
- House of Commons Library, [Reactions to the New Plan for Immigration: a reading list](#)