



The Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Statement in response to the UK Government's Illegal Migration Bill

People come to the UK for a multitude of reasons. Numerous are driven from their homes by persecution, conflict, poverty, natural disasters, or lack of opportunities.

Many of them attempt the extremely dangerous journey across the Channel to reach the relative safety of the UK.

Everyone would like to see the end of dangerous Channel crossings using small boats, however, the UK Government's Illegal Immigration Bill, the stated purpose of which is to bring an end to these crossings, raises more questions than it provides answers.

The Bill fails to provide sufficient detail on the establishment of more safe and legal routes for people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

These routes, which are a lifeline to many desperate and vulnerable people, are essential if the Government is serious about ending perilous Channel crossings. Due to their very vulnerability many refugees and asylum seekers cannot possibly have all the necessary documentation with them. This proposed Bill will automatically force their removal regardless of how or why they came here.

There is also a pressing need for reform of the asylum process which currently has a backlog of hundreds of thousands of asylum applications.

The Government must remember that behind each application is a human being. The establishment of asylum processing centres in France could help speed up the process and provide a safe, legal route for vulnerable people to come to the UK.

We call on the UK Government to provide an assurance that it will respect the terms of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Refugee Convention, and its obligations to victims of modern slavery.

These people are our fellow human beings, our brothers and sisters, and regardless of their immigration status their intrinsic dignity must be upheld.

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