

Nationality and Borders Bill 2021

URGENT ACTION BRIEFING

Ahead of Second Reading, July 2021



Please contact your MP today – ahead of the Second Reading debate on 19 and 20 July

These proposals to reform the UK's asylum system will make it harder for people fleeing conflict or persecution to seek sanctuary. Please contact your Member of Parliament to make the case for protecting human rights and promoting human dignity in our asylum system.

Find your MP's contact details at members.parliament.uk or by calling 020 7219 3000.

What is the Nationality and Borders Bill?

The Bill is a proposed new law that has been put forward in the UK Parliament by the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, on behalf of the UK Government. It is intended to change the way that decisions are made about asylum claims across the UK.

What is the Second Reading?

The Bill was introduced into the House of Commons at the First Reading on 6 July 2021. At the Second Reading, MPs will get to debate the general principles of the Bill, and vote on it. This debate is due to take place on 19 and 20 July 2021. After its Second Reading, the Bill then gets detailed line-by-line consideration, when amendments can be brought and voted on. We will produce a subsequent briefing paper for when the Bill gets to this stage, and will be asking you to contact your MP again.

MPs have a chance to influence and decide on ways to change or improve the law, by asking questions, proposing amendments and voting. **It is important that MPs know what their constituents think about legislation, so they can scrutinise proposals and hold the government to account for its promises.**

What does the Nationality and Borders Bill say?

The Bill and explanatory notes are available on the Parliament website at bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023. It would implement many of the proposals in the '[New Plan for Immigration](#)' launched in March 2021, which the government claims aims to increase the fairness of the asylum system and deter illegal entry into the UK. However, many of the measures risk creating more injustices in the system which will increase the trauma and pain experienced by asylum seekers attempting to reach safety in the UK. Key points include:

- making it a criminal offence to knowingly arrive in the UK without permission
- reforming the asylum system so that the route via which someone arrives in the UK will determine the way a claim for asylum is processed. People arriving in the UK via an 'irregular' route (e.g. a channel crossing) will be sent back to a 'safe' country they passed through on their way to the UK, or granted only temporary permission to stay in the UK, with limited family reunion rights and limited access to benefits.
- increasing the punishment for people smugglers and gangs who facilitate entry to the UK
- introducing "reception centres" for asylum seekers and those whose claims have been rejected, providing "simple, safe and secure accommodation" while claims and returns are being processed
- streamlining and integrating the legal and asylum claim processes
- strengthening the safe and legal ways in which people can enter the UK, including through the new UK Resettlement Scheme which started in February 2021, and granting resettled refugees indefinite leave to remain when they get to the UK.

What have Churches said?

Many Church leaders and Christian organisations have expressed concern about these proposals. In May 2021, more than 80 Church organisations issued an [Open Statement to the Home Secretary](#) which said:

We believe these proposals lack humanity and respect for human dignity. We believe it would be wrong to create a system in which the way people enter the UK will impact how their asylum claim is processed and the status they might receive.

Many people who are forced to flee their homes in desperate circumstances simply have no choice but to cross borders informally to reach a safe haven; to penalise them for this is to abandon the very principle of international protection. Moves to criminalise and penalise undocumented entry to the UK mean it will effectively be impossible for most people to claim asylum because safe and legal routes are extremely limited, and could never feasibly be made available to all who need them.

We welcome the government's commitment to resettlement through the new UK Resettlement Scheme and look forward to the announcement of resettlement targets for the years to come, but this must not be at the expense of an asylum system that strives to offer protection to those who need it.

Many Church groups across the UK have also joined [Together with Refugees](#), a new coalition of more than 250 organisations which is calling for a more humane approach to people seeking protection in the UK.

What shall I say in my message to my MP?

Our experience is that it makes more impact on an MP to write a personal letter, or have a meeting with them, than to simply sign petitions or send standard email messages; the 10 minutes it takes to write and send your own message, or have a brief conversation, can be a better use of time than spending thirty seconds completing an online form. So, we encourage you to use your own words.

You should address your MP courteously and respectfully; remember, you are wanting your MP to do something for you. If you are writing, give your address (to show that you are from the constituency; most MPs will only respond to messages from people who live in their own constituency), and which church you belong to. You may want to get others from your church to write their own letters, or you could send one letter on behalf of a group (or, if you are able, the whole congregation).

As well as the points made in the statement above, you might raise one or more of the following points:

- The positive contributions that asylum seekers and refugees make to congregations and communities
- That many legal experts believe the proposals breach obligations of the UN Refugee Convention, and will cause harm and suffering to those escaping from war or persecution
- The lack of safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum to get to the UK
- The importance of giving people who are seeking asylum the chance to integrate, by learning English and having opportunities to make friends and contribute to society
- The UK only takes a tiny proportion of people who have been forced to leave their homes; as a wealthy country with welcoming communities we have capacity for more kindness and compassion
- Any review of the asylum process should listen to the experts: asylum seekers themselves.

Make sure your message includes a request for the MP to respond to your views, either in writing or to ask to set up a meeting or phone call. **Please contact your MP today.**