



All MPs

29 March 2023

Dear Colleague,

Illegal Migration Update

Last year, over 45,000 people made an illegal, unnecessary, and dangerous journey across the Channel in small boats. The increase in the number of small boat arrivals, from 300 in 2018 to over 45,000 in 2022 has placed our asylum system under unsustainable pressure. Many of those arriving in small boats originate from safe countries and all have travelled through safe countries to skip the queue. These journeys put lives at risk and divert our finite resources from those in genuine need. This is unfair on the British public who are forced to pay eye-watering amounts to accommodate these individuals.

People will only stop taking treacherous journeys across the Channel in small boats if they know that if they come to the UK illegally, they will not be able to remain here. That is why our Illegal Migration Bill will ensure that anyone arriving illegally will be detained and swiftly removed, either to their home country or a safe third country where their humanitarian needs can be met. The Bill goes further than any previous immigration legislation to do what is necessary to fix the problem of small boats, while remaining within the boundaries of our treaty obligations. And of course, while we reform the asylum system, we will continue to honour our safe and legal commitments, including to Afghans and Ukrainians.

But legislative change takes time, and it is not a silver bullet. Since the Prime Minister's illegal migration update in December, the Government has:

- signed the largest ever small boats deal with France to prevent channel crossings;
- struck a new agreement with Albania which makes it unambiguously clear Albania is a safe country, enabling us to reject asylum claims and send individuals swiftly home;
- established a new, permanent Small Boats Operational Command with hundreds of new staff in the Channel;
- increased Immigration Enforcement activity, with more than 3,500 enforcement visits since December 2022;
- reformed our modern slavery rules to make our system harder to exploit;
- expanded our deal with Rwanda to include relocation of all those who have travelled through safe countries to arrive in the UK illegally;
- reduced the backlog of initial decision claims to put us on track to eliminate the legacy initial decision backlog by the end of the year; and
- increased the removals of dangerous Foreign National Offenders (FNO) to pre-pandemic levels.

Today we are going further and announcing a range of measures to relieve the use of hotels over time and create a more sustainable accommodation system for asylum seekers. There are

currently over 45,000 asylum seekers living in hotels around the country, at a cost to the taxpayer of more than £6 million a day, or around £2.3 billion a year. The use of hotels in some cases can be detrimental to local economies — including coastal towns reliant on tourism — taking valuable assets away from communities, and placing pressures on local public services. It is essential that we develop a more appropriate system for accommodating asylum seekers, as our close European neighbours are also doing, to ensure that the UK does not become a magnet for the millions of people that are displaced globally.

Supporting local communities and expanding the dispersal market

I have heard time and again of councils up and down the country struggling to accommodate arrivals. The Government recognises that placing asylum seekers into local areas comes at a cost, and so central government will now provide further financial support.

Today, we are announcing a new funding package which includes a generous additional per bed payment and continuation of the funding for every new dispersal bed brought online. We will also pilot an additional incentive payment where properties are made available faster.

There are currently 56,000 people in dispersed accommodation, and we will increase this significantly over the coming months as a result of the measures we are announcing today, thus reducing costs as we reduce our reliance on hotels.

To support the rapid provision of accommodation in local areas, the Government will tomorrow be laying a SI that will temporarily exempt asylum accommodation from house in multiple occupation (HMO) licensing requirements. The exemption will apply to properties which begin use as asylum accommodation until the 30 June 2024 and last for a two-year period. Accommodation will be subject to a robust inspection regime by suitably qualified staff to provide assurances on the safety of accommodation.

Alternative accommodation

However, to meet the scale of the challenge we must go further. We need to fundamentally change our approach to accommodation provision. Accommodation should be rudimentary, and nothing more, and it needs to be designed to protect local communities.

This is why the Government is announcing the first tranche of sites that the Home Office will set up to deliver basic accommodation at scale. We will open alternative accommodation in Lincolnshire, Essex and East Sussex. We are also bringing forward proposals to provide accommodation in Catterick Garrison in the Prime Minister's constituency. And we continue to explore the possibility of accommodating migrants in vessels as has happened in Scotland and the Netherlands. Together these sites will deliver thousands of bed spaces over time.

Across all these sites we are working closely with local service providers to create bespoke plans developed in collaboration with local police, and care boards and others. Basic healthcare will be available; on-site security will be provided twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week; and our providers will work closely with local police to ensure bespoke plans are in place to reassure the local community. Funding will also be provided for local authorities where these sites are located to help manage any pressures.

Together these steps will start to deliver a more orderly and sustainable system for managing the pressures of illegal migration on communities. The long-term use of hotels is not only unfair for taxpayers but can be detrimental to local communities. Local authority dispersal and alternative accommodation offer a way to manage the asylum population more effectively, efficiently and with reduced impact on communities overall, which is why countries like France, Belgium and Greece have adopted a similar approach. We are committed to working with local authorities and residents to ensure that new sites are managed sensitively and that local areas have the resources that they need.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Minister of State for Immigration