

## **Safe Passage Now**

PCS has launched a new pamphlet titled “Safe Passage Now: The way to stop the boats and save lives”.

The pamphlet follows the release of our Safe Passage policy in November 2022 which argued for a humane alternative to the government’s disgraceful treatment of refugees.

The latest deaths of refugees in The Channel are a grim reminder of just how little the government values the life of some of the most desperate people imaginable. These deaths, and the dozens that have come before them, are harrowing and wholly preventable.

With each perilous journey, the risk to life is immense, and thousands of men, women and children are making it. In the first half of 2023, nearly 11,500 people crossed the Channel. And on a single day in July 2023, a new daily record was set when over 600 people arrived in small boats.

It doesn’t have to be this way. We published our Safe Passage Visa policy in November 2022, and we made it clear that this was the best and only answer to stop the boats and save lives. Since then, more refugees have died, and the government has doubled down on its disgraceful treatment of refugees. And this government will continue to plumb new depths now that the Illegal Immigration Act has become law.

From the Rwanda policy, to the failed attempts to push boats back in the Channel, to housing refugees in dangerous and unsafe barges, nothing has worked. Far from solving the problem, these heartless and inhumane policies have inflicted even more suffering on traumatised refugees.

In the face of this cruelty, and with an ever-present risk of more avoidable deaths, the time for a Safe Passage Visa scheme has never been greater. Neither of the two main political parties has a humane solution, despite cross-party support for Safe Passage in both the House of Commons and the Lords.

The treatment of refugees will be a pivotal issue at the next general election and growing the strength of the calls for safe passage as a compassionate alternative will be crucial. That's why our safe passage campaign will continue to build support from the ground up, by educating and empowering people in the movement and putting pressure on those in positions of power.

Too many people have died and more lives will be lost unless something is done. That something is Safe Passage and its time is now.

#### **How a Safe Passage Visa Scheme Would Work**

A Safe Passage Visa would allow a person already in Europe to obtain a visa, for travel purposes only, to enter the UK. That person would then claim asylum on arrival and subsequently go through the normal UK asylum process.

The initial application would be made online, or by visiting one of the several already existing visa centres located across Europe. Crucially, this would mean there would be no need for processing centres in France and consequently no build-up of refugees in Calais.

The decision at this stage of the process isn't whether to grant asylum, it's simply to determine whether the asylum claim is viable. If the asylum claim is deemed viable, the visa would be granted, and travel permitted to the UK. If a claim does not satisfy the requirements for asylum, the claim would fail.

Similar schemes were set up for certain nationalities in response to global events, such as in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Hong Kong. For refugees not covered by these schemes, the only way to claim asylum is by physically being in the UK, so many people are forced to make dangerous journeys to enter the UK. This scheme removes the need for refugees to make these dangerous journeys.

The Ukrainian scheme is the best comparison to the Safe Passage Visa scheme because Ukrainian refugees that were scattered across Europe – much like those who make small boat crossings – were offered refuge in the UK quickly and efficiently. There has been no single reported incident of a Ukrainian refugee crossing the Channel in a small boat or a Ukrainian refugee drowning.

The success of the Ukraine scheme adds further weight to the calls for Safe Passage Visas. More refugees are risking their lives and everything the government has tried has failed.

It's been demonstrated time and again that there is a viable alternative to the government's callous response. Safe Passage Visas is that alternative and it's one that reduces the risk to life, breaks the people smugglers' business model and treats human beings with the dignity and respect they deserve.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Will more people come?

Anyone who wants to come is coming anyway, and every attempt made by the government to stop people from risking their lives hasn't worked. Under the current system, anyone can get in a small boat and come to the UK. A Safe Passage Visa scheme provides visibility and control over numbers.

Wouldn't those refused a visa get in a small boat to make the crossing anyway?

If a person is denied a visa in the initial application process, it's been decided that they do not have a viable asylum claim. Therefore if a person knows that they wouldn't be able to claim asylum when they get to the UK, there is very little incentive for them to make the crossing.

Why do some refugees not stay in other countries in Europe?

93% of refugees in Europe don't come to the UK. In 2022, France received twice as many asylum applications as the UK and Germany three times as many. Those that do wish to come to the UK choose to do so because they have familial, language and cultural ties. The system would break down entirely if one country followed by another refused to take their fair share of refugees.

How many people should we accept?

The government has issued nearly half a million visas for refugees from Ukraine and Hong Kong. There is no reason why it shouldn't also accept refugees from other countries who cross in small boats, whose numbers are in the tens of thousands.

Why don't refugees come via a legal route?

If a refugee isn't covered by a specific visa or resettlement scheme, they won't be able to enter the UK legally. And since the only way for these people to claim asylum is by physically being in the UK, they don't have any choice other than to use small boats and lorries. This scheme creates a legal route for these refugees.

What will the French say about plans for a safe passage visa scheme?

This scheme would be a solution for France just as much as the UK. The online processing avoids the need for a processing centre in France and would discourage any build-up of refugees in Calais. Following the invasion of Ukraine, there was an initial build-up of Ukrainian refugees in Calais, but this quickly disappeared once the visa scheme was operational.

Where can I find out more information about the scheme?

[Read our full report, which we launched alongside Care4Calais.](#)

#### **Actions**

- [Sign our e-action/write to your MP](#)
- Raise the issue of Safe Passage Visas at your next union or labour party branch meeting. Please contact [campaigns@pcs.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@pcs.org.uk) for access to draft motions and to arrange speakers for local meetings.
- Share content from our social media pages using the hashtag #SafePassage.