

12 September 2023

Safe Passage for Refugees: PCS TUC Fringe event

PCS's Fringe event at TUC Congress, Safe Passage for Refugees, was well-attended on Tuesday lunchtime.

The event at TUC Congress in Liverpool chaired by PCS president Fran Heathcote saw a discussion on PCS's plan to address small boat crossings in the Channel by proposing a [humane alternative](#) to Rwandan deportation.

The policy, which has been backed by more than a dozen unions, calls for:

- The implementation of a Safe Passage Visa scheme, to allow refugees to enter the UK safely and begin their asylum claim.
- greater investment in Home Office to ensure that staff in the department have the time, space and resources to properly determine asylum claims; free from political pressure and interference.
- reform of immigration detention centres, so refugees are helped rather than punished; and to provide a better working environment for staff to produce better outcomes and a supportive environment for refugees.

The policy would break the people smugglers' business model and would mean refugees would not have to risk their lives in small boats.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka congratulated the Fire Brigades Union for their work on challenging the government's decision to house refugees on the Bibby Stockholm.

He then said: "It's austerity that causes problems in this country – not the small number of people who come here to claim asylum.

"We have funded the legal challenge to the government's Rwanda policy because you can't put a price on saving lives or on stopping workers being told to do things they don't want to do.

To applause he said: "Not a single person has been deported to Rwanda."

He continued: "The government is stoking up fears, division and hostility. This Safe Passage policy is a solution to the problem.

"Refugees are human beings fleeing to find a better life and we should be welcoming them, treating them humanely."

Referring to the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme, Clare Moseley, founder of Care4Calais, said: "Not a single Ukrainian got into a small boat, risking their lives. When there's a safe and legal route, people will take it.

"Our proposal is aimed at those people who are coming anyway. Creating visas won't lead to more people coming here."

Weyman Bennett from Stand Up To Racism started by thanking PCS for giving refugees a voice. He said: "We have to speak out about how refugees are treated, how the attack on refugees is a misdirection by the government.

"It's not the small boats we have to worry about – it's the big boats and the yachts owned by millionaires.

"It's down to the trade unions to make a difference, to campaign against fascists and make sure they end up in the bin of history where they belong."

"Refugees are human beings fleeing to find a better life and we should be welcoming them, treating them humanely."