



**TAUNTON
WELCOMES
REFUGEES**

Rebecca Pow MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

11th August 2021

Dear Rebecca,

In 2018 you very kindly attended our 'birthday party' and pledged your continuing support for our work with resettled families. You have repeated that promise on the various occasions when we have also asked to meet with you as our MP. For that we are very grateful. In the meantime, our work has expanded to support young people (UASCs) who have come to Taunton under the National Transfer Scheme, and we expect, shortly, to be supporting individual asylum seekers who will be arriving via the Dispersal Scheme.

As our work now includes support of those who have to negotiate their way through asylum applications with uncertain outcomes, we have already voiced to you our concern about the draft New Migration Policy (as it was). We wish now to restate our concerns in a more direct manner, as the policy is now in the process of becoming the Nationality and Borders Bill.

We believe the Bill is now at the committee stage. It is at this point that we would like to engage with you over specific points, because this is where we believe influence can be brought to bear on the Bill. We do not need a standard reply, which tells us what the Government has been doing over the last five or so years, or is currently doing - we know that already and, indeed, include that in the training material for our volunteers. What we do need is for you, as our MP, to represent our views – even if you do not share them, and to convey the real depth of dismay that we feel about certain portions of this Bill.

Our main points of concern are:

- The continual denial of the right (according to international law) to claim asylum in the UK as country of choice, except under incredibly restrictive and limited conditions.
- We abhor the idea that asylum seekers should be penalised by their method of arrival i.e. whether they have engaged the services of people smugglers or not.

This shows a complete lack of understanding about the process of forced migration and how such journeys are actually financed. In our experience, very few have a) the knowledge of or b) access to the proposed 'safe routes' for resettlement. Those opportunities are open only to a very fortunate few.

- We are particularly horrified that people fleeing for their lives may then be criminalised for using the 'wrong route'. Interpretation of the Bill seems unclear – but we hope that the increased penalty for 'illegal entry' from 6 months to 2 years does actually apply to those already removed for criminal activity (as spelt out in the draft policy), and not generally to asylum seekers as they arrive on our shores without documentation (which seems to be the common interpretation of the new Bill).
- We find it incomprehensible that the Government should pass a Bill which involves agreements with other countries, which at the time of passing the Bill are non-existent i.e. for returning would-be asylum seekers as they cross the channel, or returning for processing of applications.
- We suspect that currently the Afghan Threat and Risk Evaluation Unit (ATREU) in Kabul is a) probably unable to process its applications in an appropriate time scale and b) many qualifying individuals may not have safe access to make their applications. This will inevitably force them into the trans-Europe/people smuggling routes. How then, will they be treated on arrival at our borders – and what extra efforts are being made to meet this overwhelming emergency on the ground, in Afghanistan?

We do feel very strongly about these issues and would request the opportunity to voice that to you directly, if that could be arranged. We note that UNHCR has expressed a deep concern about this proposed legislation – which, of course, is unprecedented for them. Apart from the individual human tragedies being played out behind these decisions, there is also a cost to our international reputation in the passing of this Bill, as it stands.

Yours Sincerely,



Simon Forrester
Acting Chair



[Taunton Welcomes Refugees](http://www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk)

A charitable incorporated organisation number 1183921

www.tauntonwelcomesrefugees.co.uk