



From the Chair

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**The Rt Hon Suella Braverman MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA**

Dear Ms Braverman

We, at Taunton Welcomes Refugees, have seen a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers asking for help in Somerset over the last 18 months. We are now working alongside both pre-dispersed families at a hotel in the outskirts of Bridgwater, as well as dispersed asylum seekers across the geographical area in which we operate (roughly Wellington, Minehead, Taunton and Bridgwater). The majority have come to us from the Middle East or Northern Africa (including Sudan).

We have become increasingly concerned with the language used in the Home Office, for example in a recent LBC interview. It is sometimes inaccurate and potentially inflammatory, on a subject of extreme political sensitivity where extreme views and activities can easily be triggered. For example:

- The Home Office has described human beings as 'illegal' and 'illegal immigrants'. No asylum seeker is 'illegal' nor an 'illegal immigrant'. It is unclear how a human being can be 'illegal'. All human beings have the right to claim asylum at our borders if fleeing persecution. As per the Refugee Convention, to which the UK has been a signatory since 1951, any person can enter a State by whatever means to seek asylum. Furthermore, the Refugee Convention explicitly states that people cannot be penalised for their method of entry. There are no

'legal routes' to the UK for the purposes of seeking asylum. – There is currently no way to apply at the first country of safety (which would save the dangerous and debilitating cross-Europe routes) nor is there any resettlement scheme for those without dependent children. Insinuating that people do not have the right to claim asylum at our borders or that they are 'illegal' in any way suggests that the Home Office is attempting to circumvent our obligations under international law. Indeed, the UNHCR have recently expressed their profound concern on the UK's attempts to deny access to the UK's asylum system. Those whose applications are rejected may have failed because they are classed as economic migrants, or because they are charged with an illegal activity. But they are still not 'illegal immigrants'.

- You and your colleagues have described the influx of about 45,000 asylum seekers arriving by boat as 'overwhelming' or as 'astronomical numbers of migrants crossing the Channel'. However, you have not used the same language to describe the 250,000 Ukrainians that we have already welcomed on the HfU scheme. To note, it has been found that the majority of people who crossed the channel in 2022 have been given refugee status and thereby the right to remain in the UK.

- Even more concerning, in this last week you and your colleagues have stated "We are seeing heightened levels of criminality when related to the people who've come on boats related to drug dealing, exploitation, prostitution." and raised concerns about how the "different lifestyles" of people arriving could undermine "cultural cohesiveness". In addition, you have claimed that Channel migrants are more likely to be criminals, based on unspecified information from police chiefs. While any criminal element in any sector of society is deeply concerning, these comments lay the foundations for unacceptable responses to asylum seekers who have every right to be here. They are already deeply traumatised and in need of help – not judgement and hostility.

We request the immediate production of statistics of criminality among asylum seekers arriving by boat, and the withdrawal of the blanket statements that imply all asylum seekers are suspect and in some way are threatening our 'cultural cohesiveness'. It is these unsubstantiated and potentially inflammatory remarks that may achieve that!

Yours sincerely

Rev Lynne Mayers

Cc     Rebecca Pow MP  
         Ian Liddell-Grainger MP  
         Richard Foord MP