



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

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CHANNEL CROSSINGS

Since Covid-19 reached Europe, with the first lockdown in Italy on 9th March 2020, the media have been reporting Channel crossings with ever increasing excitement as if this was a new phenomenon. There have been reports in the past about asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean to Malta and Italy in small unseaworthy boats, and some dying in the attempt. But until recently crossing the much shorter distance across the Channel seems to have gone under the radar.

In mid-August, under the more sober headline 'A rather small invasion', The Economist published an unofficial tally of about 2,000 asylum seekers crossing the Channel last year, which has risen to about 4,000 this year. Crucially, these numbers represent a small proportion of those claiming asylum. Last year, around 36,000 people claimed asylum in the UK, as compared to 124,000 in France and 142,500 in Germany. That means that those who are on the French coast waiting for the chance to cross the Channel really do want to come to the UK, where we should be welcoming them for the contribution they will make to Britain.

We say the UK should be creating safe and [legal](#) routes to claim asylum. Assuming they can safely leave their own country, anyone who wishes to claim asylum should be able to lodge a preliminary claim at any UK embassy or consulate, or failing that at immigration control when they board their plane, train or ferry to the UK, which will give them a temporary entry visa for the purpose of seeking asylum. That way the travel companies will cease to be de facto immigration officers, and asylum seekers will be saved the extra expense of paying people smugglers, hopefully putting them out of business, while avoiding the inherent [danger](#) of a Channel crossing or of stowing away in a plane, lorry or train. Such an entry visa would prevent the situation [reported](#) in The Guardian, where the Home Office treated differently members of the same family with the same reason to seek asylum, just because one received a visitor visa and arrived by plane whereas the other three did not and came across the Channel.

What the UK should not be doing is putting children into detention (a practice the Liberal Democrats in Coalition forced the Conservatives to drop), when they have arrived across the Channel and Kent County Council can no longer cope with the numbers involved. Our Home Affairs Spokesperson's trenchant response to this may be found [here](#).

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

The Commons Home Affairs Committee has set up an [inquiry](#) on Channel crossings, migration and asylum seeking routes through the EU.

LD4SOS would welcome any evidence from its readers, whether they wish to present it directly to the Home Affairs Committee themselves, or wish it to be included in the submission LD4SOS will be making. The deadline is 12 noon on Monday 14 September 2020, and the Terms of Reference may be found [here](#).

If you are considering a submission, you may wish to look at the five safe and legal options, none mutually exclusive, [published](#) earlier this month in The Guardian, or indeed whether the evidence you are aware of suggests further alternative approaches.

ENFORCING THE LAW?

What is clear is that the effort and expense put into law enforcement by both French and UK Governments has failed to stop people coming, with many better uses for the money they waste in the process, and that we will never know how many the people-smugglers have got safely through into the UK. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees does not require seeking asylum in the first country of arrival: a Convention refugee remains one even when they cross more than one border. Our Prime Minister disgraces us all when he [claims](#) it is 'criminal' to cross the Channel to seek asylum, and his government's reliance on the EU's Dublin Regulation to justify sending people back to France or another EU member state as a safe country they have come through fails to acknowledge their Convention status.

As Tim Farron [says](#) about both child and adult refugees: 'The Conservatives have failed to meet even their own commitments to resettling child refugees. They have refused to expand family reunion rules so that unaccompanied child refugees can sponsor family members to join them. They've chosen to take the UK out of Europe-wide protections for unaccompanied refugee children, putting these children's safety at risk. And they have made no commitment on refugee resettlement beyond next year. This is a disgrace. The Conservatives are failing people in the most dire of situations. And not only are they failing refugees - they're waging war against them in the media and online with their vile rhetoric.'

ACTION YOU CAN TAKE NOW

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants have written to the Home Secretary Priti Patel on behalf of 100 civil society groups demanding safe and legal routes now. LD4SOS has signed this as an organisation, and you can do so [here](#). You will also find a link to a page enabling you to write to your MP urging them to take action.

AN EMERGENCY MOTION FOR OUR VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

If you are attending the Federal Liberal Democrat conference, James Cox of LD4SOS has submitted a draft Emergency Motion on our behalf arising from the issues the current crisis has highlighted. If Conference Committee accepts it for the ballot, we would be grateful for your support.