



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Sarah Boyack MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Lothian Region

Boris Johnson MP,
Prime Minister
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
Sent via e-mail

21st June 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

We write to raise our concerns about the UK Government's plans to remove people who have arrived in the UK without authorisation to Rwanda for consideration of their asylum claim.

We have signed this letter because we think the plan is inhumane, ineffective, and damaging to UK's position in the world.

By outsourcing our asylum system, we refuse to play our part in the international protection system and deny our responsibility, which is both a legal and ethical one, to help those forced to flee their homes.

Inhumanity and unlawfulness aside, the scheme simply won't work. Since you announced this plan, more than 4,300 people have reached the UK in small boats, which is more than two and half times the number that crossed in the same period last year and maintains the same pace of increase seen since the beginning of the year. Instead of preventing the avoidable death of innocent people in the English Channel, this scheme will further feed the trafficking of vulnerable people through north Africa, across Europe, and back into the UK. We know that the vast majority of refugees relocated from Israel to Rwanda and Uganda under a similar scheme between 2014-17 immediately left again due to the conditions. Many of them put themselves in danger in an attempt to reach Europe. Rather than deter their arrival, refugees will continue to seek sanctuary in the UK but the fear of relocation to Rwanda will drive them underground into exploitation and abuse rather than the into the asylum system.

This scheme would be equally shameful whichever state the UK chose to abdicate its responsibility to, but the choice of Rwanda is particularly alarming. Academics, the United Nations and various organisations, including Freedom of Torture and Amnesty International have expressed concerns over the treatment of refugees upon arrival in Rwanda. Despite the country's progress, violations of the rights to a fair trial, freedom of expression and privacy, alongside enforced disappearances, allegations of torture and excessive use of force, have not ceased. As recently as 2021, the UK Government itself

has cited ongoing concern about the Rwandan Government's restrictions to civil and political rights and media freedom.

LGBT+ rights may be protected on paper, but discrimination and homophobia persist in Rwanda, making it a very precarious and unsafe environment to be in – particularly for vulnerable groups. Human Rights Watch reported last year that “Rwandan authorities rounded up and arbitrarily detained over a dozen gay and transgender people [...] and others in the months before a planned June 2021 high-profile international conference.”

Refugees are already in a vulnerable group, but LGBT refugees are exposed to additional risk of harm – to send them to a country that does not recognise their human rights is beyond despicable.

The UK has not pioneered the offshoring approach to immigration - we can draw experience from Australia, which was the first to adopt this model. According to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, about 1,200 men, women, and children who sought refuge in Australia and were transferred to the remote Pacific island nation of Nauru, suffered severe abuse, inhumane treatment, and neglect. Your Government is well-aware of these violations as Britain itself was so critical of Australian offshoring at the UN Human Rights Council¹. You ignore the lessons of history at your peril.

Expelling people who have fled war, persecution, and utter desperation from a place of safety to one of insecurity is cruel, and a breach of the UK's commitments under international human rights law. The UK's plans will inevitably be deemed unlawful and ultimately they will fail, but in the process they will put people who have already been through enough, in avoidable danger.

We are calling on the UK Government to reconsider, respect international law and act with humanity.

Signed:

Sarah Boyack MSP, Lothian (Scottish Labour)
Anas Sarwar MSP, Glasgow (Scottish Labour)
Martin Whitfield MSP, South Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Graeme Dey MSP, Angus South (Scottish National Party)
Claire Baker MSP, Mid-Scotland and Fife (Scottish Labour)
Carol Mochan MSP, South Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP, Edinburgh Western Constituency (Scottish Liberal Democrats)
Neil Bibby MSP, West Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Paul O'Kane MSP, West Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Mercedes Villalba MSP, North East Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Foyso Choudhury MSP, Lothian (Scottish Labour)
Pauline McNeill MSP, Glasgow (Scottish Labour)
Monica Lennon MSP, Central Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Paul Sweeney MSP, Glasgow (Scottish Labour)
Emma Roddick MSP, Highlands & Islands (Scottish National Party)
Liam McArthur MSP, Orkney (Scottish Liberal Democrats)
Jenni Minto MSP, Argyll & Bute (Scottish National Party)
Michael Marra MSP, North East Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Rhoda Grant MSP, Highlands and Islands (Scottish Labour)
Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP, Glasgow (Scottish Labour)
Beatrice Wishart MSP, Shetland Islands (Scottish Liberal Democrats)
Siobhian Brown MSP, Ayr (Scottish National Party)

¹ Source: [BBC.co.uk](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-56141111)

Fulton MacGregor MSP, Coatbridge and Chryston (Scottish National Party)
Colin Beattie MSP, Midlothian North and Musselburgh (Scottish National Party)
Fiona Hyslop MSP, Linlithgow (Scottish National Party)
Willie Rennie MSP, North East Fife (Scottish Liberal Democrats)
Daniel Johnson MSP, Edinburgh Southern (Scottish Labour)
Annabelle Ewing MSP, Cowdenbeath (Scottish National Party)
Stuart McMillan MSP, Greenock & Inverclyde (Scottish National Party)
Maggie Chapman MSP, North East Scotland (Scottish Green Party)
Ross Greer MSP, West Scotland (Scottish Green Party)
Mark Ruskell MSP, Mid Scotland and Fife (Scottish Green Party)
Gillian Mackay MSP, Central Scotland (Scottish Green Party)
Ariane Burgess MSP, Highlands and Islands (Scottish Green Party)
Marie McNair MSP, Clydebank and Milngavie (Scottish National Party)
Stephanie Callaghan MSP, Uddingston and Bellshill, (Scottish National Party)
Karen Adam MSP, Banffshire and Buchan Coast (Scottish National Party)
Katy Clark MSP, West Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Jackie Baillie MSP, Dumbarton (Scottish Labour)
Colin Smyth MSP, South Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Mark Griffin MSP, Central Scotland (Scottish Labour)
Richard Leonard MSP, Central Scotland (Scottish Labour)

Gary Christie, Head of Policy, Communities and Communications (Scottish Refugee Council)
Fiona Crombie, Clinical Services Manager (Freedom from Torture)