



Sabir Zazai
Chief Executive of the Scottish Refugee Council
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25 May 2021

Dear Mr Zazir,

Thank you for your letter of 26 April to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Scottish Refugee Council and other Scottish civil society and faith and belief communities about the New Plan for Immigration. You copied your letter to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland. I am replying as the Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice.

I am proud that the United Kingdom has a generous asylum system that offers protection to the most vulnerable via defined safe and legal routes. Since 2015, we have resettled over 25,000 men, women and children seeking refuge from persecution across the world - more than any EU country. We continue to welcome refugees to the UK through the new global UK Resettlement Scheme launched in February. We have also welcomed more than 29,000 close relatives through refugee family reunion.

These achievements are possible because of the outstanding commitment of local authorities, the Devolved Administrations, NGOs, our international partners, community and faith groups, and individual members of the public. I would like to thank Scottish civil society and faith and belief communities across Scotland for playing their part in this collaborative effort and for their commitment. I hope to see continued support.

I am glad that you agree with us that the asylum system needs reform. It has been collapsing under the pressure of what are in effect parallel illegal routes to asylum, facilitated by criminal gangs smuggling people into the UK. This is why we have brought forward the New Plan for Immigration: the most significant overhaul of our asylum system in decades. To not act is not an option. Our plan will deliver a new, comprehensive, fair but firm long-term plan, because while people are dying we have a responsibility to act which we cannot delay on.

Anyone who arrives in the UK from a safe country, such as France, and who did not come directly from a place of danger without good cause; or has a connection to a safe country where they could reasonably have claimed asylum, may be deemed inadmissible for asylum in the UK. This is aimed at deterring dangerous journeys and upholding the first safe country principle. The alternative is the current system that is exploited by human traffickers who encourage vulnerable people to risk their lives crossing the Channel.

The proposals outlined in the New Plan for Immigration are compatible with our international obligations and any legislative changes will be assessed to ensure compliance with our international obligations including ECHR. In addition, I can reassure you that we will not return anyone from the UK whose life would be at real risk or who would be subject to inhuman or degrading treatment on their return.

On the consultation, I would like to thank you for your response to the questionnaire and your participation in the deep dive sessions. I acknowledge your comments on the impact of the elections in Scotland, and assure you of our commitment to engagement with Scottish civil society groups. I can assure you that the consultation response, including targeted sessions with stakeholders, are key to informing our reforms and ensuring that we can deliver effective legislative change across the immigration and asylum system. In addition to the online portal and questionnaire, we have been running a series of public focus groups. These have been a series of public-facing engagements which have captured the views of members of the general public across the whole of the UK, including those with lived experience of our immigration system.

I would like to reassure the civil society organisations working with refugees that we stand by our moral and legal obligations to help innocent civilians fleeing cruelty from around the world. The New Plan for Immigration will deliver a new system that is firm but fair. We will provide international protection through safe and legal routes, while taking steps to discourage people coming to the UK illegally to claim asylum.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to the civil society organisations working with refugees across Scotland for the welcome and support they provide to those in need of international protection.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Philp', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Philp MP