



**HOUSE OF COMMONS**

LONDON SW1A 0AA

18<sup>th</sup> July 2022

*Dear Constance,*

**RE: ASYLUM & REFUGEES - NATIONALITY AND BORDERS ACT 2022**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of asylum and refugee resettlement, specifically in relation to Ukraine; your comments upon which I have read with great compassion and interest. I have also made your views known directly to ministerial colleagues.

The United Kingdom has a proud history of supporting those in need of protection; and our resettlement programmes have provided safe and legal routes to better futures for hundreds of thousands of people from across the globe in recent times. This includes individuals from Hong Kong, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

I was proud to be the Minister to take the *Nationality and Borders Act* through the House of Commons, and you will be aware that there were many important opportunities for thorough debate and scrutiny before it was passed into law. It became law on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and delivers the biggest overhaul of our asylum system in decades. I would, therefore, like to provide you with a substantive response looking at the whole asylum and resettlement programme, rather than just Ukraine.

Regarding Afghanistan, in January 2022, the Minister for Afghan Resettlement announced the launch of the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), which will resettle up to 20,000 eligible people over the coming years. This is in addition to those who have been relocated under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. It is particularly encouraging that the two remaining referral pathways onto the ACRS have now opened, which means the UK will honour its commitment to eligible personnel who were called forward, or specifically authorised for evacuation, but who were unable to board flights.

Since 2015, the UK has resettled over 27,000 refugees through safe and legal routes directly from areas of conflict and instability. Furthermore, the refugee family route, which enables the spouse or partner and children of a refugee sponsor who are under 18 years of age to join their family member in the UK, has provided more than 39,500 family reunion visas from the same year.

I have always believed that resettlement is vital as a safe and legal pathway to protection for vulnerable refugees fleeing persecution. It is right, and I shall continue to ensure, that the Government continues to offer safe pathways for those in need. The launch of a new global UK Resettlement Scheme will build on the success of previous schemes and continue our proud record of resettling refugees who need our help from around the world.





The *Nationality and Borders Act* allows the UK to continue to resettle genuine refugees directly from places of danger and to offer refugee family reunion. It improves support for refugees to help them build their lives in the UK, integrate, and become self-sufficient members of society. The legislation also introduces a new temporary protection status for those who do not come directly to the UK, or who do not claim asylum without delay once here, but who have, in any event, been recognised as requiring protection.

Of course, in accordance with its international obligations, the UK considers each claim for asylum on its individual merits. I know that the Government takes its international responsibilities seriously and will grant protection to those in genuine need.

In order to make the system fairer and more effective, the Government plans to introduce new asylum reception centres, to replace hotels. I understand that the reception centre model is used in many European countries, including Switzerland and Denmark. These will provide simple, safe, and secure accommodation to stay in while their claims and returns are being processed.

I am aware that a number of constituents have written to me calling on the Government to introduce a specific commitment to resettle a set number of refugees each year. While I sympathise with the sentiment behind this suggestion, I do not think imposing a numerical target is the best method of aiding those in need. Instead, I believe the number of refugees settled each year should be based on the UK's capacity and the Government's assessment of the international situation. Operating in this way has already effectively enabled the UK to respond to both protracted and emerging humanitarian crises.

While the *Trade and Cooperation Agreement* between the EU and the UK does not include provisions on asylum, returns, family reunion for unaccompanied minors, or illegal migration, both the UK and the EU note the importance of good management of migratory flows, and recognise the geographical and logistical circumstances, including ferry services and the Common Travel Area. Therefore, I welcome that the UK and the EU released a joint political declaration which made clear the UK's intention to engage in bilateral discussions with the most concerned Member States to discuss suitable practical arrangements on asylum, family reunion for unaccompanied minors, or illegal migration.

In order to address the unacceptable cost to the taxpayer from housing migrants in hotels (including those who have arrived through resettlement programmes), a new, nationwide dispersal system has been introduced so asylum pressures are more equally spread across local authorities. This will be accompanied by the opening of a new, bespoke, asylum reception centre at Linton-on-Ouse.

Ultimately, the *Nationality and Borders Act* brings a new, comprehensive, fair but firm, long-term plan which addresses the challenge of illegal migration head on, and is intended to help take down the serious organised criminals exploiting people and profiting from human misery. Only by tackling illegal immigration can we effectively help those most in need. It is a complex issue and there is no simple solution, but I am determined that we shall find appropriate ways to stop the criminal gangs involved in people trafficking into this country.



I am further encouraged that the Government's Equality Impact Assessment for the Act included considerations of possible impacts on women who have been subject to sex-based violence and/or trafficked for a sexual purpose, and outlined the work the Government, including through training and working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will undertake to protect such individuals.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you, then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Tom Pursglove'.

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**