

After the news this week that 27 migrants tragically died crossing the channel, the debate over the UK's border control has been thrown back into the spotlight.

The number of migrants crossing the channel has increased dramatically in recent years. According to data from the Home Office, in 2019, there were just 1,835 crossings. It then jumped to 8,461 in 2020, and in 2021 it rose to an enormous 25,776.

But why are so many more small boats making the perilous journey across the world's busiest shipping lane? To figure this out, we first must look at *where* they are coming from.

According to data given to the British Refugee Council, most channel crossers come from Iran, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria, with Iranians making up 29% of all crossings (the highest percentage of any nationality).

Iran is in the midst of a massive human rights crisis. Over the last three years, the Iranian government has been brutally cracking down on dissent using lethal force against protestors and reportedly torturing those in detention.

The country is one of the leading proponents of the death penalty and is known to use enforced disappearances, conduct unfair trials and subject citizens to public floggings.

Iraq, Sudan, and Syria are facing equally alarming situations. The lives of residents are constantly at risk leading to many seeking asylum.

But why are they choosing such a dangerous route?

At the moment, it is the only option they have. The "official" routes to seek asylum are difficult and complex processes that don't even guarantee entry. The Refugee Council, a UK based refugee charity, says that Home Office decisions remain poor, and so many refugees must rely on the courts to help them.

In the last 18 months, around 3,187 Iranians have crossed the channel. In that same period, just 1 Iranian was granted asylum through official resettlement schemes.

With many official resettlement schemes, like the one for Syrian refugees, being shut and there being no resettlement scheme for those fleeing Afghanistan, those seeking asylum in the UK may feel forced to risk their lives crossing the channel.

It is important to highlight that it is *not* illegal to cross the channel, nor is it illegal to claim asylum in the UK. There is also no legal requirement for asylum seekers to settle in the first safe country they reach, meaning they are well within their right to leave France to come here if they wish.

Home Secretary Priti Patel is working to tighten the sea border by any means necessary, including possibly turning away boats. The Joint committee on Human Rights has warned that this would "do the opposite of what is required to save lives". It would also be in breach of The European Convention on Human Rights.

In a debate on the subject following the casualties this week, Lord Kerr warned against the measures the Home Secretary wishes to put in place. He said that unless the UK provides a safe route for asylum seekers, “we are complicit with the people smugglers”.

Although there is disagreement on what methods to use, it’s clear most agree that something needs to be done to quickly if the UK is to prevent further deaths.

**Accompanying data visualisations.**



# Channel Crossings 2021

1 Boat = 100 Crossings

