



December 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about migrants crossing the Channel.

I was deeply saddened by the tragic drownings and loss of life in the Channel. My thoughts are with the loved ones of those who died and the first responders. This awful incident highlights the danger of crossing the Channel by small boat and the ruthlessness of the criminals who are exploiting vulnerable people.

I am determined to bring to justice the ruthless criminal people smugglers whose actions endanger lives. The Home Secretary is taking all action possible to stop criminals exploiting vulnerable people and I offer my support to this important work.

There is a global illegal migration crisis with long-term pull factors and criminal gangs who treat human beings as cargo, and as such there is no quick fix. I fully support the Government's approach of tackling issues upstream and not simply waiting until people have reached EU countries. The Home Secretary has been extremely clear that she and the Government see co-operation with international partners as essential.

I believe there are two key elements to ending these dangerous crossings - changes to the UK's asylum system to remove the pull factors and immediate operational and diplomatic work to stop the boat crossings.

The Government's new plan for immigration will be put into law through the Nationality and Borders Bill. This Bill includes far-reaching reforms to the asylum system to address many of the underlying factors to deter illegal migration. Measures include a one-stop appeals process; the ability to process claims outside the country; the ability to have differentiation and declare inadmissible to our asylum system those who arrive in the UK having passed through safe countries; and life sentences for people smugglers. People should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, and nobody needs to flee France in order to be safe.

However, the Home Secretary has been clear that we cannot simply wait for the Nationality and Borders Bill to become law. The Government has been taking, and will continue to take, action to prevent crossings now. Co-operation with France has resulted in more than 20,000 crossings being stopped this year with 17 organised criminal groups dismantled and over 400 arrests and 65 convictions.

The Prime Minister and Home Secretary have reached out in the spirit of co-operation to France and other key partners to intensify talks and discussions. The UK has put forward a number of ideas to prevent these dangerous journeys from taking place. These include joint France-UK patrols, maritime patrols, airborne surveillance and the deployment of advanced technology such as ground sensors and radar. I believe it is also vital that action is taken to deepen intelligence sharing to deliver arrests and prosecutions on both sides of the Channel.

This action, both immediate and longer term reflects the Government's urgency in stopping these crossings, saving lives and securing the UK border.

It should go without saying that any approach Border Force use is safe and legal. It is also the case that the Home Office continues to evaluate and test a range of safe and legal options to deter people from making



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these dangerous, illegal and unnecessary crossings. I believe the surest way of saving lives at sea is to stop these crossings and I welcome any safe and legal effort by Border Force to achieve this.

If the occupants of small boats are intercepted by the Border Force or Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) they are medically assessed and transferred for interview by immigration enforcement officers. At this point they may make a claim for asylum and will be processed in the usual way. However, if an individual is known to have made a claim in another country the Home Office will look at the process of returning them as promptly as possible.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY