**CSAN Statement on the Illegal Migration Bill**

We at Caritas Social Action Network are profoundly concerned about the Government’s Illegal Migration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 7 March 2023. This Bill, if passed, will not only deny those people fleeing war and persecution their right to seek safety in the UK and apply for asylum, but will punish them, based on how they came here, not whether they need protection. This would amount to an asylum ban.

The Bill would:

* Remove the right to seek refugee protection in the UK for those who arrive irregularly.
* Breach the UN Refugee Convention, of which the UK is a founding signatory.
* Fail to provide the safe routes we need now.
* Leave thousands of men, women, and children in limbo, detained, and denied a fair hearing.

UNHCR, the Refugee Agency of the United Nations, has expressed its profound concern about the proposed Bill, stating, “The effect of the Bill (in this form) would be to deny a fair hearing and to deny protection to many genuine refugees in need of safety and asylum. This would be a clear breach of the Refugee Convention and undermines the United Kingdom’s longstanding, humanitarian traditions.”

The Bill ignores Home Office data which shows that most people who cross the Channel are people escaping torture and conflict from countries like Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria. Most people who make the crossing are granted asylum following rigorous checks. There are very few safe routes for refugees to come to the UK. This Bill would be turning our back on the global common good and adding to the burden on poorer countries, which receive most refugees.

On 14 March 2023, the Department for International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, published *Love the Stranger: A Catholic Response to Migrants and Refugees*. This document sets out a number of key principles, including:

* The dignity of the human person at the root of our response to migrants and refugees.
* The right of a state to control its borders, but not based on economic factors alone: we have a responsibility to the wider world.
* Avoiding the use of immigration detention, arbitrary expulsion and other practices which violate human dignity.
* The need to fulfil our obligations under international frameworks protecting migrants and refugees, such as the Refugee Convention.

We encourage the Catholic community to engage with this document as a source of inspiration for our response to the Bill. The document can be found at: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger/>

We urge the Catholic community to speak out against this cruel and unworkable Bill which is an affront to human dignity and a breach of our responsibilities to the global common good and our obligations under international law.

We call on the Catholic community to write to their MPs, asking them to:

* Protect rather than punish refugees by defending their fundamental right to seek asylum.
* Stand up for the UN Refugee Convention and this country’s proud history as a founding signatory.
* Ensure the Government provides alternatives to dangerous journeys, including safe routes.
* Insist on an effective asylum system which is just and compassionate, gives people a fair hearing and reduces the backlog in a fair manner.

You can find out who your MP is here <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons> and either write to them or email them.

A template letter can be found at:

We strongly urge the Government to reconsider this Bill and instead pursue more humane and workable policy solutions which respect the dignity and rights of migrating people.



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Chair of CSAN CEO of CSAN

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