

# Hundreds of asylum seekers in UK told they could be removed to European countries



Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel speaks during a media briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic in Downing Street, London, on January 21, 2021.

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More than 1,500 asylum seekers in the UK have been left in limbo after being told they are being considered for removal to “safe third countries” as part of a plan that has been widely condemned by immigration advocates.

Earlier this year, British Home Secretary Priti Patel announced plans for the UK to reject asylum seekers who arrive in the country by transiting through other nations where they could have safely claimed asylum.

It is not uncommon for asylum seekers to transit through other countries, often European Union-member countries, before reaching the UK.

However, under the new rule, which was introduced as part of the UK's post-

**Brexit New Plan for Immigration**, those who traveled through a “safe” third country before reaching Britain would be returned to make their asylum claim there instead.

Despite UK having yet to announce agreements with other countries to safely facilitate the returns, new data published by the British government shows that at least 1,503 people have been told their asylum claims are not being considered as Britain’s Home Office determines whether they can be removed.

## **‘Reckless and impractical’**

Responding to the findings, Amnesty International branded the Home Office’s plans “reckless and impractical”.

“New statistics published today by the Home Office show that immigration rules introduced by the Home Secretary last December have led to more than 1,500 people who have sought asylum in the UK being warned the Home Office is looking to send them to other countries,” the organization said in a statement published on Thursday.

“There are no agreements in place for those countries to accept responsibility for their asylum claims. To date, none of these people have been removed from the UK,” Amnesty said.

“Today’s data shows that so far nobody refused admission to the UK’s asylum system under the new rules has been accepted by a third country,” the organization continued.

Ultimately, Amnesty said, if an asylum seeker is not accepted by another country, the UK will have to eventually consider their claim.

By delaying that process, Amnesty asserted, “these new rules risk doing no more than adding to Home Office delays and backlogs”.

In a statement on Thursday, Steve Valdez-Symonds, refugee and migrant rights director at Amnesty International UK said the Home Office’s new asylum rules are “reckless and impractical - and are not in keeping with the spirit and purpose of international refugee law”.

“With these rules, the Home Secretary has merely introduced more uncertainty and delay which causes immense anxiety to people seeking asylum while adding to the mountain of existing backlogs,” Valdez-Symonds said.

“We don’t need these oppressive new laws and rules – we need the Home Secretary to focus on making the UK asylum system more accessible, reducing not adding to delays and improving the quality of decision-making so women, men and child refugees receive the protection of this country to which they are entitled,” he said.

## **Home Office defends plans**

In a statement sent to Euronews, a Home Office spokesperson said: “People should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach, rather than making dangerous journeys to the UK.”

“These dangerous and criminally facilitated journeys are completely unnecessary as France and other EU nations are manifestly safe countries with fully functioning asylum systems,” they said.

“All countries have a moral responsibility to tackle the issue of illegal migration and we are in negotiations with our international partners,” the spokesperson asserted, adding: “Our reforms in the New Plan for Immigration will overhaul our asylum system and speed up the removal of failed asylum seekers.”

## **Asylum claim processing delays already on the rise**

Already, the British government’s data shows that despite fewer asylum applications being made over the last year – a drop of 24% – tens of thousands of people have been waiting for longer than six months for a decision on their applications, representing an increase of 71% over the past year.

In a statement shared with Euronews, Mike Adamson, chief executive at British Red Cross, said: “Today’s statistics show exactly why urgent action is needed to create a fair, effective and humane asylum system.”

“These delays leave people in unsafe accommodation, with little or no financial support and unable to move on with their lives for months and even years - adding to the traumas they’ve already been through and to the costs of the asylum system,” he said.

“Unfortunately, dealing with these delays is largely absent from the Government’s Plan for Immigration. It’s a missed opportunity for much-needed progress,” Adamson said.

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