

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

November 2022

Dear Courtneve

Thank you for your email about migrants crossing the Channel.

I am determined to bring to justice the ruthless criminal people smugglers whose actions endanger lives. The Government is taking all actions possible to stop criminals from exploiting vulnerable people and I offer my support to this important work. Co-operation with the French has stopped more than 29,000 illegal crossings since the start of the year—twice as many as last year—and destroyed over 1,000 boats. Our UK-France joint intelligence cell has dismantled 55 organised crime groups since it was established in 2020.

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 Nationality and Borders Act includes far-reaching reforms to the UK's 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 for 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.

Alongside legislative steps, the Government has been taking action to prevent crossings now. I warmly welcome the announcement that the military has taken operational command of responding to small boats in the Channel, in partnership with Border Force. This will be backed up by £50 million in new funding that will deliver new boats, aerial surveillance and expert military personnel. In doing so, it will bolster Border Force teams and their existing patrol vessels and provide a Wildcat helicopter.

Together this will significantly enhance law enforcement's ability to detect boats. The increased surveillance will mean better evidence can be gathered for criminal investigations, ensuring more people smugglers who trade in these life-threatening journeys can be referred for prosecution and brought to justice.

The Royal Navy will continue to support the Home Office until January 2023 when the operational arrangements will be reviewed. I understand this review was always planned.

This year has seen a surge in the number of Albanian arrivals, many of them, I am afraid to say, abusing our modern slavery laws. We are working to ensure that Albanian cases are processed and that individuals are removed as swiftly as possible—sometimes within days.

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I hope you can see from this response that the Government is taking firmer action to stop these crossings. I am encouraged by this work but will push the Government to continue to act fast to make this route unviable and to end the cruel and dangerous people smuggling between France and the UK.

Once again, thank you for taking 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.

yours faithfully
Peter Gibson

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