

23065 The British government is planning another crackdown on asylum-seekers

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Ali's first experience of Britain was of kindness. A few miles from Dover the fishing boat he had taken from Dunkirk sprang a leak; along with several dozen fellow migrants he was rescued by the coastguard. On the shore, people were waiting with blankets. Nine months on, things are now looking pretty bleak for the 21-year-old Iranian. Living in an overcrowded hotel in Carlisle, he is unable to work or continue his education. He has no idea how his asylum application—made on the grounds that as a Christian in Iran he was threatened with persecution—is progressing.

That is nothing compared with the anxiety he feels about his father, who arrived on another small boat two weeks later. Within days the Home Office had chosen him for the first plane of asylum-seekers bound for Rwanda, as part of a government plan not just to process claims in the African country but to keep successful applicants there. That flight was cancelled on June 14th after the European Court of Human Rights intervened; Ali's father has since been waiting in a hotel near Gatwick to learn his fate. Ali fears that, if asylum flights to Kigali ever go ahead, he will never see his father again.

The plan to fly people to Rwanda was cooked up last year in order to deter migrants taking small fishing vessels and flimsy inflatable boats across the English Channel. Tighter security on ferry and tunnel routes helps explain why such crossings have risen every year since 2018. In 2022 some 45,755 people came to Britain in this way.

That is still lower than the number of claims lodged in either France or Germany. It represents only a fraction of the overall number of immigrants that entered Britain in 2022. But small boats are a bigger problem than the numbers suggest. This is partly because of humanitarian concerns: in recent years dozens of migrants have died in the channel. But it is also because such a visible manifestation of the government's inability to control its borders has become a big political headache.

Nothing the government has so far tried has worked. In the past four years Britain has made four deals with France to beef up security in Calais, where migrants (and traffickers) congregate. The latest, struck in November, had the same limits as the others: it does not let British authorities patrol in France nor return those whose asylum claims fail.

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