# Dover struggles to shift focus from migrant crisis to its ongoing social and economic woes



For years, Dover was known primarily as a charming seaside town, prized for its iconic white cliffs, scenic sea views, and as an accessible spot for families seeking British sunshine. Yet, in recent times, the town has been recast under the harsh spotlight of Britain’s ongoing migrant crisis. Since the crisis began, Dover's coastline has seen more than 182,000 arrivals via Channel crossings, turning this once quiet town into a focal point of national debate and media coverage. However, residents express frustration at the way this narrative obscures more pressing local concerns such as economic decline, a crumbling high street, soaring housing costs, and strained public services.

Locals insist the popular image of Dover as "migrant central" is misleading. David Faux, a resident, told the Daily Mail that the migrants are largely moved on from the town and not visible on the streets, leaving Dover quieter than its reputation suggests. "There’s a false reality," Mr Faux said. While the town bears the consequences of the crisis in terms of resource allocation and public attention, he said the real issue is the lack of investment and support from local authorities, leading to boarded-up shops and dwindling amenities. Dover ranks among the top ten UK areas where residents face homelessness risks, as average house prices soared to £282,000, surpassing last year’s figures despite the economic struggles in the area.

The social fabric is further strained by the cost-of-living crisis, with employment rates falling and benefit claims rising in 2024. Trussell, a key foodbank partner, revealed that between April 2024 and March 2025, they distributed 7,874 food parcels locally, nearly one-third for children. Kent as a whole has experienced population growth, with over 21,000 new residents between 2023 and 2024, adding further pressure on housing and public services. These local hardships fuel complex community tensions. As Steve Rebbeck, another local, observed, the clashing protests seen in Dover—some demanding to "Stop the boats" and others supporting asylum seekers—are symptomatic of broader dissatisfaction with the council’s handling of issues beyond immigration.

Retail and infrastructure woes amplify these challenges. Dover’s high street is a shadow of its former self, with many shops permanently closed, forcing residents to travel elsewhere for essentials. Paul Taylor, who runs a vape shop, attributes this decline to a neglect of investment and says the migrant crisis diverts critical resources away from regeneration efforts. Traffic congestion, worsened by Operation Brock’s management of freight vehicles heading to Dover’s port, and pothole-ridden roads compound residents’ frustrations. Yet, despite these difficulties, some local businesses such as Lydia Alton’s independent coffee shop have noted an unexpected uptick in French tourists, challenging the perception that migration issues have deterred visitors.

On the national stage, the political handling of Dover’s migrant situation continues to evolve. When Labour leader Keir Starmer launched his campaign, he pledged to stop small boats crossing the Channel. More recently, Defence Secretary John Healey indicated a tougher stance on immigration, including potential plans to relocate some asylum seekers to military sites. However, he ruled out removing Britain from the European Convention on Human Rights, a contentious measure debated in immigration policy circles. Critics, including Rob Bates from the Centre for Migration Control, have accused the Labour government of shifting responsibility onto local councils without sufficient consultation or support, exacerbating strains on communities like Dover.

The scale of the Channel crossings remains significant. Just this year alone, tens of thousands have made the perilous journey—over 6,200 migrants since the start of 2024, with daily arrival surges recorded in March and April. Despite heightened media attention on Dover as the arrival point, research and local testimony suggest many migrants are swiftly distributed away from the town, limiting direct visible impact. However, the cumulative pressure on housing, social services, and local cohesion is undeniable.

As this complex situation unfolds, Dover's community message is clear: the migrant crisis should not eclipse the urgent need to address the town’s deeper economic and social challenges. Residents call for renewed investment, infrastructure improvements, and a focus on the cost of living—issues that genuinely affect their daily lives and the future of their once-thriving coastal town.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/uk/2024/05/29/dover-the-coastal-constituency-on-the-frontline-of-migration/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/what-dover-residents-make-of-small-boat-crossings-13242009), [[6]](https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/02/07/small-boats-to-dover-are-big-political-issue-for-britain/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/migrant-crisis-labour-accused-passing-buck-communities-dumping-migrants-doorstep)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/migrant-crisis-labour-accused-passing-buck-communities-dumping-migrants-doorstep), [[5]](https://news.sky.com/story/what-dover-residents-make-of-small-boat-crossings-13242009)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/migrant-crisis-labour-accused-passing-buck-communities-dumping-migrants-doorstep)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c51wqg3x8wno), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c72p5jnvmzko)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15091229/The-forgotten-town-frontline-Britains-migrant-crisis-locals-Dover-left-small-boats-war.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c51wqg3x8wno> - On 21 March 2024, over 500 people crossed the English Channel in small boats, marking the highest daily total for that year. This surge brought the total number of Channel crossings to 4,043, surpassing the previous year's figure of 3,683. The Home Office reported that ten boats were intercepted, carrying 514 migrants. Additionally, a man was found with stab wounds upon arrival at Dover Western Docks. This incident underscores the escalating challenges posed by the increasing number of migrants arriving in the UK via small boats.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c72p5jnvmzko> - Between 14 and 15 April 2024, the Home Office recorded 748 migrants arriving in Kent after crossing the English Channel. On Saturday, 214 individuals were brought ashore at Dover, followed by 534 on Sunday. This brought the total number of migrants arriving in the UK via small boats since the start of 2024 to 6,265. The government highlighted the 'unacceptable number' of crossings, emphasizing the importance of proposed policies, such as the Rwanda strategy, to address the situation.
4. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/migrant-crisis-labour-accused-passing-buck-communities-dumping-migrants-doorstep> - In July 2025, Rob Bates from the Centre for Migration Control criticized the Labour government for 'passing the buck' onto local communities by dispersing migrants without adequate consultation. He highlighted the strain on housing markets, schools, and community cohesion, with over 23,000 migrants having crossed the Channel into Britain that year. Bates expressed concerns about the lack of forewarning to communities and the challenges in accommodating the increasing number of migrants.
5. <https://news.sky.com/story/what-dover-residents-make-of-small-boat-crossings-13242009> - In October 2024, Sky News reported on Dover residents' reactions to the increasing number of small boat crossings. While there was sympathy for the migrants' plight, many locals felt that the issue was not directly affecting the town. Some residents expressed concerns about the financial implications and the broader impact on the community, emphasizing the need for collaboration with France to address the root causes of illegal immigration.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2023/02/07/small-boats-to-dover-are-big-political-issue-for-britain/> - In February 2023, The Irish Times highlighted the UK's plans to crack down on asylum seekers arriving in Dover via small boats. Despite the government's focus on this issue, many locals rarely saw refugees, as most were intercepted at sea. The article discussed the political implications of the 'small boats' issue and the challenges faced by Dover residents in addressing the situation.
7. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/uk/2024/05/29/dover-the-coastal-constituency-on-the-frontline-of-migration/> - In May 2024, The National reported on Dover's position as a frontline constituency in the UK's migration challenges. The article discussed the local community's desire for regeneration and the stigma associated with the town due to its association with migrant arrivals. Residents emphasized the need for safe and legal routes for asylum seekers and highlighted the broader issues facing the town beyond migration.