# Keir Starmer faces backlash over Labour’s divided stance on Channel migrant crisis



Ministers are facing mounting pressure as they grapple with the escalating crisis of migrants crossing the English Channel. The political discourse around immigration has sharpened, especially following the recent electoral outcomes and the Labour Party's handling of immigration policy under its new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer.

Starmer has found himself embroiled in controversy after failing to back his own Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill during a crucial vote. His abstention, alongside key cabinet ministers like Angela Rayner and David Lammy, raises serious concerns about the Labour leadership's commitment to the very policies they proposed. Alarmingly, nearly one in four Labour MPs chose not to participate in the vote—an indication of deep divisions within the party and a stark retreat from their stated immigration agenda.

Critics from across the political spectrum have not held back in their criticism. Voice from the opposition have been particularly vociferous, asserting that the Labour leadership’s reluctance to support their own initiative reflects a fundamental inability to control the UK’s borders. The electorate is increasingly demanding decisive action on immigration, and Labour's lack of unified support for border control measures appears to contradict their promises. A Tory Shadow Home Secretary branded Starmer’s inaction a “disgraceful surrender” of border sovereignty, underscoring the growing frustration over the government’s passivity.

Despite the turbulence, Labour insists that dismantling human trafficking operations is essential for addressing the migrant crisis. The proposed powers for the Border Force and National Crime Agency aim to target those profiting from human smuggling. However, the introduction of draconian penalties for violations raises ethical questions about the balance between enforcement and compassion.

Starmer’s administration is facing a complex web of public sentiment regarding immigration, an issue that remains a top concern for many voters. The surge in Channel crossings has escalated perceptions of chaos, placing Labour’s previous pledges—such as abolishing the controversial Rwanda asylum scheme—under scrutiny. While Starmer has committed to recruiting specialist investigators, it’s evident that his administration is struggling to provide a robust and coherent response to this growing crisis.

The establishment of the Border Security Command is Labour’s latest attempt to coordinate efforts against illegal immigration and human trafficking. However, many view it as a continuation of failed strategies from previous administrations, lacking the decisive action needed to handle the pressing realities at hand. The public is watching closely to see if this new body will effectively address the ongoing issues that have resulted in perilous crossings.

In the coming weeks, the Labour government's capability to handle the migrant crisis will face rigorous testing—not only from opposition parties but also from an electorate craving transparent and effective solutions. As public pressure mounts, the stakes are higher than ever for a party that has yet to demonstrate a clear pathway to resolving a dilemma that weighs heavily on both ethical and national security fronts. The dialogue surrounding immigration is shifting, and the current leadership’s handling of the matter will likely define their tenure as they navigate these tumultuous waters.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2055759/migrant-crisis-keir-starmer-labour> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-keep-ban-asylum-seekers-claiming-modern-slavery-protections-2025-01-30/> - In January 2025, the UK government under Prime Minister Keir Starmer decided to uphold a ban preventing asylum seekers from claiming protections under modern slavery and other human rights laws. This decision was part of the Labour Party's effort to address the significant number of people entering the UK via small boats. The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill introduced to parliament allows police to seize asylum seekers' phones to trace people smugglers and target suppliers of boat parts used for such journeys. Despite previously criticizing similar measures, the party now plans to continue with policies enabling the detention of child asylum seekers and disqualifying claims based on modern slavery. Immigration remains a highly important issue for British voters, with rising numbers of people arriving through channel crossings in recent years. Concerns over immigration influenced the UK's decision to exit the EU, but efforts to control migration have seen limited success.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68984778> - In May 2024, Keir Starmer, leader of the UK Labour Party, pledged to immediately scrap the government's Rwanda asylum scheme if his party won the election. He stated that the funds saved would be used to hire specialist investigators to tackle small boat crossings in the English Channel. Starmer also proposed using counter-terrorism powers to 'smash' people smuggling gangs. The Rwanda scheme, announced in 2022, had been delayed by legal challenges and was intended to deter people from attempting dangerous crossings. However, Labour argued that the scheme would not effectively deter people and was a waste of resources.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premiership_of_Keir_Starmer> - The Premiership of Keir Starmer began in July 2024, following the Labour Party's victory in the general election. One of Starmer's first acts as prime minister was to cancel the controversial Rwanda asylum plan, declaring it 'dead and buried.' The Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, subsequently announced the establishment of the Border Security Command, a new agency responsible for coordinating the activities of Immigration Enforcement, MI5, the Border Force, and the National Crime Agency to tackle smuggling gangs facilitating illegal migrant crossings over the English Channel. The command was funded by reallocating money previously earmarked for the Rwanda plan and was led by the Border Security Commander, who reports directly to the Home Secretary.
5. <https://www.ein.org.uk/news/labour-party-leader-pledges-restore-rules-based-asylum-system-and-scrap-rwanda-policy> - In May 2024, Keir Starmer, leader of the UK Labour Party, delivered a significant speech in Dover outlining the party's approach to asylum and plans to prevent asylum seekers from crossing the Channel via boat. Starmer pledged to scrap the Conservative government's Rwanda policy, stating it would never be an effective deterrent. Instead, Labour proposed establishing a new Border Security Command focused on tackling and dismantling the criminal smuggling gangs behind the boats. Despite the passing of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, over 8,000 people had crossed the Channel in small boats that year, making 2024 on track to surpass the record number of crossings in 2022.
6. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/03/08/labour-will-vote-against-illegal-migration-bill/> - In March 2023, the UK Labour Party announced it would vote against the government's Illegal Migration Bill, introduced by then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman. Keir Starmer criticized the bill, stating it would not effectively address the issue of small boat crossings. He accused the government of delivering 'utter failure' with its immigration plans and warned that the problem was worsening with each new measure. The bill aimed to deter illegal crossings by implementing stricter penalties and measures, but Labour argued it would not solve the underlying issues and would not act as an effective deterrent.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Border_Security_Command> - The Border Security Command (BSC) is a law enforcement agency in the United Kingdom responsible for coordinating the activities of Immigration Enforcement, MI5, Border Force, and the National Crime Agency to tackle smuggling gangs facilitating illegal migrant crossings over the English Channel. The command was first proposed by the Labour Party in May 2024 as an alternative to the Conservative government's Rwanda asylum plan, which the party claimed would fail to address the migrant crossings and was a waste of money. After Labour's victory in the 2024 general election, the command was launched by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper on 7 July 2024, accompanied by an audit into the money already granted to the Rwandan government through the plan to see if the UK government could reclaim it.