# Refugee groups unite to challenge Starmer’s divisive immigration rhetoric



In recent developments, over 350 refugee and migrant organisations have united to combat what they deem the "politics of division" pervasive in the current British discourse on migration. Coordinated by Asylum Matters, this coalition, which includes the National Education Union and the charity Care4Calais, expresses outrage over the framing of migration under the new Labour government. Their open letter, which boasts over 600 signatures—including those of prominent figures—advocates for the rights of refugees, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and those living in poverty.

However, the tone set by Prime Minister Keir Starmer has stirred significant criticism, particularly his alarming assertion that without stricter immigration controls, Britain risks becoming an “island of strangers.” Such remarks, far from promoting an inclusive society, have sparked accusations of stoking division and echoing a narrative reminiscent of those advanced by the nationalist-populist Reform UK party. Labour MP Sarah Owen labelled his comments “shameful,” highlighting the dangers of rhetoric that alienates vulnerable communities. The letter boldly claims, “We are and will remain an island of solidarity, not strangers,” a counter to the callous framing under Starmer’s regime.

Starmer’s immigration policies mark a drastic shift in government approach, responding to public unease about soaring net migration that has reached a staggering 906,000 as of June 2023. His administration's intention to reduce these figures by 100,000 annually, alongside tighter English language requirements and cuts to social care visas, raises serious concerns. Critics, including leaders from various sectors, warn that such measures threaten to worsen labour shortages in crucial areas, particularly social care, which is already in crisis.

The government’s effort to reshape the immigration system to favour higher-skilled workers while tackling illegal immigration aligns unsettlingly with sentiments expressed by the rival party, which points to the increasing discontent among constituents. Starmer’s unpopular reforms have faced backlash not only from critics outside his party but also from within, as fears grow that this approach could further alienate vulnerable groups and strain societal cohesion. The imposition of a 6% levy on international student fees and stricter residency requirements present additional threats to the UK’s higher education sector, revealing a pattern of detrimental policy-making.

As tensions escalate, divisions within the Labour Party are becoming evident. While some, like Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, attempt to rationalize Starmer's approach as essential for balancing diversity and control, others decry the language used, warning it could backfire. The government attempts to deflect blame for the immigration surge onto the previous Conservative administration, asserting that the public’s desire for reform justifies their stringent measures.

With Starmer positioning himself against the Reform UK party as his primary challenger, he faces the arduous task of maintaining support from traditional Labour voters in a shifting political landscape. Rising public support for Reform UK underscores the dilemma for Labour, as they navigate the contentious terrain of immigration policy while attempting to maintain inclusivity and uphold the rights of diverse communities.

The open letter from migrant and refugee groups not only denounces the government’s rhetoric but serves as a clarion call for awareness about the contributions diversity brings to society. In a climate of increasing polarization, it demands a move towards more humane dialogue and criticizes any approach that could dehumanize vulnerable populations.

Ultimately, the future of immigration discourse in Britain is at a crossroads, where the need for urgent reform clashes with the essential call for solidarity and community cohesion—arguments unlikely to be reconciled under the present government’s strategy.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/refugee-migrant-groups-join-hundreds-35284844> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/92070e36-921a-458d-ab37-6c682b9da645> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has taken a tougher stance on immigration, echoing some of the rhetoric of nationalist-populist parties like Reform UK. This shift comes amid growing public concern over immigration, which has returned to the forefront of political issues after surging net legal migration reached 906,000 in the year to June 2023. Starmer’s government aims to reduce this figure by approximately 100,000 annually through measures such as stricter English language requirements for migrants, scrapping visas for care workers, and rebalancing migration towards higher-skilled workers. However, these policies come with risks. Critics argue that they could hinder Labour's goals of improving public services and economic growth. The clampdown also overlooks small boat migration, a key area of anti-immigrant sentiment, and may exacerbate staffing shortages in the already strained social care sector. A planned levy on income from overseas students could harm university finances, and extending the settlement path to ten years might deter talented migrants. For these reforms to be successful, the government must address underlying issues such as workforce skills gaps and economic inactivity among UK citizens.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/55bcac8b-6430-4040-b005-6cc24325dc71> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has introduced stringent immigration reforms, sparking significant backlash from businesses, the care sector, and universities. The new policies extend the settlement period for migrants to ten years unless they show significant contributions to the UK and eliminate visa options for lower-skilled roles, including for social care workers. International students will also face stricter post-study residency rules and universities must pay a 6% levy on international student fees. Starmer positions the reforms as a corrective to what he describes as the previous Conservative government’s uncontrolled immigration policy, despite accusations of political maneuvering following a surge in support for Nigel Farage’s Reform UK party. Critics argue the measures will exacerbate labor shortages and strain critical sectors. Business leaders, educators, and care providers warn of economic risks and loss of global talent. The government estimates these reforms could reduce net migration by 98,000 annually, bringing it to around 240,000 by 2029-2030. However, economists contend that high migration has not hampered growth, contrary to Starmer’s assertions. The policy shift has also drawn condemnation from within the Labour Party for adopting right-leaning rhetoric and undermining economic stability.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-steps-up-efforts-tackle-organised-immigration-crime-west-balkans-2025-05-14/> - British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced increased efforts to combat organized immigration crime in the Western Balkans, aiming to strengthen his position amid political pressure over immigration policies. During his first official visit to Albania, Starmer revealed measures to prevent deported Albanian nationals from re-entering the UK and to combat money laundering between the two countries. The UK will donate forgery detection machines to help identify fake passports. Additionally, the UK will expand its joint migration task force to include North Macedonia and Montenegro, building on existing partnerships with Albania and Kosovo. This initiative follows a sharp decline in Albanian migrants arriving in the UK via small boats, largely due to a previous deportation agreement. The increased attention to illegal migration complements Starmer's broader pledge to reduce legal migration significantly, warning that without stricter immigration rules, Britain faces the risk of becoming "an island of strangers."
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/f9b2cf94-a4f0-4d32-94f2-5fe274f764b2> - Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer faced criticism for his recent speech on immigration, where he warned that the UK risks becoming an "island of strangers" without stricter immigration controls. His comments drew comparisons to Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 "rivers of blood" speech. However, Downing Street firmly rejected these parallels, emphasizing that Starmer supports the contributions migrants make and merely calls for a fair and controlled immigration system. The government attributed the current record-high immigration levels to the previous Conservative administration and stressed the public's desire for reform. Critics within the Labour Party, including MP Sarah Owen and London Mayor Sadiq Khan, expressed concern over Starmer’s language, warning it could foster division. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper defended Starmer, asserting his messaging supports diversity and control simultaneously. Planned policy changes include stricter English language requirements, extended citizenship application periods, and higher skill thresholds for foreign workers—excluding key sectors facing shortages.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/087f35aa-6d0b-49ec-af6c-9b30b87d787d> - UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer now identifies Nigel Farage's Reform UK as his primary political opponent amid rising support for the party and waning Conservative influence. Starmer believes a major political realignment is underway, referring to the Conservatives under Kemi Badenoch as nearing "the end of the road." Public opinion polls confirm this shift, showing Reform UK ahead of both the Conservatives and Labour. Despite mounting criticism from within his party over welfare cuts and his tough rhetoric on migration, Starmer continues to push his agenda. He recently visited Albania to firm up his migration policy ahead of next week's EU-UK summit. Starmer is also proposing "returns hubs" for failed asylum seekers, though Albania has declined involvement. Farage, capitalizing on record-high small boat crossings and the government's inability to curb illegal migration, has called for a national emergency. Starmer's approval ratings continue to decline sharply, especially among Labour voters, despite his attempts to refocus political debate around migration and economic control. His warnings about the increasing threat from Farage underscore concerns about the efficacy of his strategies and the challenge of converting political messaging into tangible results.
7. <https://labour.org.uk/updates/press-releases/keir-starmer-speech-change-be-part-of-it/> - In his speech, Keir Starmer criticized the Conservative Party for failing to act in the national interest by not planning for Brexit and serving only one side of the divide. He emphasized the need for a government that unifies the country and addresses the concerns of all citizens, particularly regarding immigration and its impact on jobs, the economy, and living standards. Starmer highlighted the importance of democratic reckoning and the necessity for change to prevent the country from being stuck in a "doom-loop" of paying more and getting less.