

Policy briefing: Routes-Based Approach

Understanding the Route-Based Approach

The route-based approach addresses the complex realities of global migration. Together, states, UN agencies, and civil society partners implement a set of comprehensive and coordinated interventions along primary migratory routes. These are undertaken in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Such measures help alleviate the suffering and human rights abuses faced by migrants. Simultaneously, they also help states manage the challenges around irregular flows of migration.

In the UK context, asylum policy has focused too heavily on boat arrivals at our shores. A broader focus is required. An approach purely based on deterrence, exemplified by policies such as the now defunct Rwanda Plan, is not only inhumane but also ineffective.

Key principles

Shared Responsibility

Cooperation and coordination amongst the international community is essential to shared responsibility. This often involves international development assistance, diplomatic efforts, and peacebuilding initiatives.

Human Rights Focus

Treating refugees with dignity and respect, and ensuring safe and orderly migration pathways.

Comprehensive Solutions

Combines humanitarian aid, capacity building, and resettlement programs with the need to address root causes of migration.



Safe routes

Safe routes, an integral part of the route-based approach, provide legal pathways for displaced people to relocate and help ease the burden of long asylum backlogs. Current UK safe routes include:

- **Resettlement schemes.** Includes the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), Community Sponsorship, and the Mandate Scheme.
- **Bespoke schemes.** Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Family Scheme, as well as two pathways for Afghans and the British National (Overseas) visa for those in Hong Kong.
- **Family reunion.** Allows immediate family members to join settled refugees, but lacks provisions permitting children to bring their parents.

International Development along migratory routes – and its challenges

Major routes such as the **Central Mediterranean and Western Mediterranean routes** expose

1%

Only around 1% of the world's refugees will ever be resettled. (IRC, 2024).

9,554

The number of refugees who the UK granted protection to through resettlement schemes, in the year ending September 2024. (Refugee Council, 2024).

85,000

The number of refugees resettled globally in the first six months of 2024. (UNHCR, 2024).

migrants to risks like trafficking, exploitation, violence, and environmental dangers.

The IOM has **recorded nearly 30,000 deaths or disappearances** in the Mediterranean since 2014, with over 3,000 in 2023 alone. These complex routes are often intertwined and are constantly influenced by dynamic factors such as political instability, natural disasters, conflict, and economic downturns.

The UK needs to make an impact by providing coordinated humanitarian assistance with partnered countries and third sector organisations. It should also increase safeguards for the rights and protection of refugees, address the root causes of migration, and contribute to viable alternatives to irregular migration.

In 2024, **the UK committed £84 million over the next three years** to respond to the roots of irregular migration in Africa and the Middle East. This move could be a promising step. However, broader, sustained efforts are needed to support the route-based approach and provide meaningful alternatives to dangerous migratory journeys.

Policy recommendations

- **Expand the scope of the family reunion visa** to have a broader definition of family member and to allow unaccompanied minors to sponsor their parents and siblings.
- **Introduce a humanitarian visa scheme** to allow people to safely travel to the UK to claim asylum. This could focus on countries with high Channel crossings and asylum grant rates, and be aimed at helping vulnerable populations who have fled major crises and persecution.
- **Reduce processing delays** for resettlement applications by increasing the number of Home Office caseworkers.

Learn more

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