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## Immigration and Asylum

### Scottish Parliament Oral Answers

#### United Kingdom Immigration Rules (Agriculture Workers)

**Fulton MacGregor (SNP)** [S6O-03088] To ask the Scottish Government how proposed United Kingdom immigration rule changes will potentially affect overseas workers in the agricultural sector in Scotland, in light of the recent letter from Scotland Food and Drink, and industry partners, to the Home Secretary.

**Reply from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The UK Government's arbitrary decision to reduce net migration is ultimately really short-sighted and will dramatically constrain Scottish employers' ability to recruit the skills that they need from overseas.

Migrant workers play a hugely vital role across the breadth of our economy, including the food and drink industry, and those changes could cause irreparable

damage to the food supply chain as well as to the wider sustainability of our rural economy.

Only independence would give Scotland the opportunity to devise a humane, principled approach to migration that is needs based and delivers positive outcomes for our communities, our public services and our economy.

**Fulton MacGregor:** As the newly published “Supporting and enabling sustainable communities: action plan to address depopulation” indicates, tackling the issue of the lack of people, and the lack of powers to attract them to live and work in rural areas, as well as in urban areas such as my constituency, is urgent. What is the Scottish Government’s understanding of the Labour Party’s policy intent around giving Scotland control over migration powers? ...

**Mairi Gougeon:** It is important to highlight that we published our addressing depopulation action plan last week, which sets out our strategic approach to managing what is a complex challenge. It is about supporting communities to be sustainable into the future, through talent attraction and migration.

This year, we will launch a talent attraction and migration service, which will enable employers to use the immigration system effectively and efficiently to help meet the labour and skills needs that we know we have, as well as enabling people to access good-quality information to help them move to Scotland and settle in our communities.

I wish that we had Labour’s support for our efforts, but, as we all know, just like the current Tory Westminster Government, Labour does not support fully devolving migration powers to Scotland, which prevents us from developing policy that better meets Scotland’s needs and interests. Only independence will give us the powers that we need to do so.

<https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=15713&i=134043#ScotParlOR>

*The letter referred to above can be read at*

<https://foodanddrink.scot/media/r1hcgizj/letter-to-home-secretary-regarding-uk-immigration-proposals-scotland-food-and-drink-and-sectoral-partners.pdf>

*The Action Plan referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-enabling-sustainable-communities-action-plan-address-depopulation/>

## UK Parliament, Ministerial Statement

### Changes in Immigration Rules

**The Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove) [HCWS258] ...**

*Changes to the Ukraine schemes*

Almost two years on from the start of the conflict, we continue to stand firm with the people of Ukraine and show that those who need our help are still warmly welcomed in the UK. We have extended that welcome to nearly 230,000 people who have come to the UK—or had their existing permission in the UK extended—under the Ukraine schemes. The British people have shown incredible generosity and solidarity with the Ukrainian people, opening their homes up to those seeking sanctuary.

Today, we are making changes to the Ukraine schemes to ensure they remain sustainable and meet the needs of those seeking temporary sanctuary in the UK.

We have today announced the intention to create a new Ukraine Permission Extension scheme (UPE) which will provide a new route for Ukrainians to apply for a further 18 months’ permission to stay in the UK on expiry of their current visa. We are also today reducing the length of new visas issued under the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme

(HFU) from 36 months to 18 months. The change to the HFU permission period is made to align with the period which will be offered to those who choose to extend their permission under the UPE. This will mean that those initially granted a visa for 36 months under the Ukraine schemes will be able to stay in the UK for a total of up to 54 months.

To ensure that visa holders have appropriate accommodation as well as the necessary in-country support to help them assimilate and thrive independently in the UK, we are also changing the sponsor eligibility under the HFU through updates to HMG guidance. Sponsors for new visas will need to be British or Irish citizens or settled in the UK—which means they have the right to live permanently in the UK. Previously, a sponsor only needed to hold at least six months' permission to stay in the UK from the date of the visa application.

The changes to the rules and HMG guidance being made today will also apply to the eligible minor's route for unaccompanied children, which is part of the HFU sponsorship scheme.

We are rationalising the offer for Ukrainians coming to the UK to provide one single out-of-country route (HFU) for all Ukrainians to apply to when seeking to come to the UK. Under HFU, there are accommodation checks, a minimum accommodation commitment from the sponsor and safeguarding checks, none of which feature in the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS). The UFS was created as an immediate response to the Russian invasion and allowed UK-based British citizens and settled persons to act as sponsors for their Ukrainian family members. We are, therefore, closing the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) to new applications from today. This will strengthen and improve the sustainability of the schemes we provide.

Ukrainian nationals who may have previously been eligible to apply to come to the UK under the UFS will remain eligible to apply to the HFU sponsorship scheme.

To ensure Ukrainian parents who have permission to stay in the UK under the Ukraine schemes can regularise the immigration status of their UK-born children, we are also amending the rules for the Ukraine Extension Scheme (UES) to ensure it remains open beyond the current closure date of 16 May 2024 for those children.

In order to ensure the integrity of the Ukraine schemes, we are reinstating a number of the general grounds for refusal provisions, which were temporarily disapplied from the Appendix Ukraine scheme.

#### *Changes relating to care workers and senior care workers in the skilled worker route*

On 4 December 2023, the Prime Minister and Home Secretary announced a plan to curb immigration abuse and cut net migration. This plan, alongside the package we have already introduced to restrict student dependants, is expected to mean around 300,000 people who would have been eligible to come to the UK under last year's rules would not be able to.

These changes include some of the measures announced in that package, namely preventing overseas care workers and senior care workers from bringing their dependants to the UK and requiring care providers in England who wish to sponsor migrant workers to be registered by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

These measures will ensure we continue to protect our NHS and social care systems, while addressing significant concerns that have emerged since the introduction of the visa about high levels of non-compliance and worker exploitation and abuse within the adult social care sector, particularly for overseas workers employed within care occupations.

Care workers and senior care workers who are already in the route will be able to extend their permission with the same sponsor, and settle, without the CQC regulation requirement applying to them. They will also be able to bring dependants, including in cases where they change jobs to another sponsor who meets the CQC regulation requirement.

The changes to the Immigration Rules are being laid on 19 February 2024. The changes to close the Ukraine Family Scheme and provide one single out-of-country route for

Ukrainians to come to the UK under HFU will come into effect on 19 February 2024. All other changes will come into effect on 11 March 2024.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-19/debates/24021971000014/ChangesInImmigrationRules>

## UK Parliament, House of Commons Oral Answers

### Immigration Rules and Border Security

**Yvette Cooper (Labour):** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on changes to UK immigration rules and the security of the UK's borders.

**Reply from the Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove):**

The security of the UK border is a top priority for me, the Home Secretary and the Home Office. Everything we do in this area is designed to reduce risks to this country and its citizens. Border Force performs checks on 100% of scheduled passengers arriving in the UK and risk-based intelligence-led checks on general aviation. It is deeply disturbing that information that has no basis in fact was leaked by the independent chief inspector to a national newspaper before the Home Office had the chance to respond. We are urgently investigating this breach of confidential information in full in the normal way.

Moving to yesterday's changes to the immigration rules, since the launch of our Ukraine schemes the UK has offered or extended sanctuary to more than 280,000 Ukrainians, thanks to the immense generosity of the British public. I know that colleagues across the House are grateful for all the work that has been going on in communities to facilitate that support. Almost two years on from the start of the conflict, the UK Government's commitment to the Ukrainian cause remains undimmed. It is right that we continue to adapt and develop our visa routes to ensure that they keep pace with the rapidly shifting situation in Ukraine. We must ensure that they remain as efficient and sustainable as possible, while providing stability for those we have welcomed to the UK and those who still need our sanctuary. Ukrainian nationals who may have previously been eligible to apply to come to the UK under the Ukraine family scheme will remain eligible to apply for the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme.

Separately, the Government remain wholeheartedly committed to reducing levels of legal migration. Measures to curb immigration abuse and further reduce net migration are being implemented, ranging from salary increases for work and family visas to reforming the shortage occupation list, removing the right for overseas care workers to bring dependants, and requiring care providers to be registered with the Care Quality Commission before hiring overseas carers. The rule changes outlined yesterday, which relate to the care sector, pave the way for those measures to take effect.

**Yvette Cooper:** It has been reported today that hundreds of high-risk private flights have landed in the UK without proper border security checks having been done. If the Minister disputes the figures, will he tell us the true ones now? Were all the high-risk private flights checked or not?

Ministers have been warned repeatedly about border security risks on private flights. ... there are risks from organised crime, money laundering, drugs and weapons smuggling, trafficking, and even terrorism. ... Criminal gangs are still organising dangerous boat crossings. There have also been repeated failures in security checks at Western Jet Foil; a 30% drop in foreign national offender removals; a 50% drop in failed asylum seeker removals; and new revelations of visa failures in the Home Office, which issued 275 visas to a care home that did not even exist. ...

Will the Minister now publish all the outstanding inspector's reports? Is it true that no inspector will be in place for the next six months? Will he tell us the key border security facts? ...

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** I am very disappointed with the right hon. Lady's response on the certainty provided by yesterday's announcement on Ukraine. ...

Of course, the first of those visas does not expire until 2025. If we add on the 18-month period, that is an additional two and a half years of certainty for individuals from the here and now, which I think is very welcome. There will continue to be an in-country and out-of-country approach. We of course engage with our Ukrainian friends and allies and will support them in any way we can. We are ahead of the curve internationally in giving that assurance. ...

We will publish the reports by the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration and our responses to them. That will happen soon. ...

The Home Office's priority is to deliver a safe and secure border, and we will never compromise on that. When notified, we cleared 100% of high-risk general aviation flights either remotely or in person, in accordance with the GA guidance, and we are committed to responding effectively, using an intelligence-led approach, as well as to working thoroughly with the wider law enforcement community. ...

This Government have a credible plan to stop the small boat crossings of the channel and the risk that they present to our security, as well as the wider criminality. Again, the right hon. Lady has opposed all those steps. We have a plan and we are working through it. That is the position and it is clear for all to see.

**Desmond Swayne:** Either I misheard, or the suggestion by the Opposition that the measure the Minister has introduced will prevent Ukrainian family members from coming to Britain is deeply untrue and highly irresponsible, isn't it?

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** My right hon. Friend summarises the situation neatly.

There will continue to be an in-country opportunity for people to apply to extend their visas. Through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, Ukrainians will still be able to come to the UK to access the sanctuary that we proudly support. We have seen communities across the country doing an enormous amount of positive, welcome work to support that national effort. Any suggestion that that will not be the case moving forward is wrong...

**Alison Thewliss (SNP):** There is a bitter irony in the UK Government making changes to health and social care visas—a sector that is crying out for people—that will make it more difficult for people to come and look after our loved ones. They say, "Come and look after our loved ones, but you can't bring your own." How utterly heartless. The sector is dominated by women, who are more likely to have children with them. What equality impact assessment has the Minister carried out on these very poor plans? What advice is he taking from the Migration Advisory Committee? This is a crisis of the Government's making. The committee encouraged the Government to pay people in the health and social care sector more and commended Scotland, which has less reliance on people coming in because we have a workforce strategy and we pay care workers the real living wage. Will he do the same?

Saturday 24 February marks two years since the escalation of Russian aggression in Ukraine—two years longer than any of us would have wanted. We are appalled that this week the UK Government have made it more difficult for Ukrainians to seek sanctuary here by closing the Ukraine family scheme with immediate effect at 3 pm yesterday, with absolutely no notice. The Minister talked of an 18-month extension, but for new applications that has been reduced from years. Those who hold visas now cannot sponsor, so the wives who want to bring injured husbands to live here presumably can no longer do so. How can he say that is fair? How can this Government say "Slava Ukraini" while closing the door to those in need?

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** To deal with the latter points first, that is not the case.



There continues to be a route for Ukrainians to come to the United Kingdom. It is arguably a more effective route to facilitate sanctuary for people, with all the enhanced checks and support that come with the Homes for Ukraine route. There is the ability for people who are here in the UK to sustain and extend their sanctuary. ... I am proud of the Government's work to support communities to facilitate that sanctuary. We will continue to be front footed and forward leaning when it comes to doing so, because it is morally critical that we are at the forefront and are giving people that certainty, way ahead of our international allies. Again, she should welcome that.

When it comes to care workers, as I have said on many occasions, the current situation for dependants is disproportionate. We saw 120,000 dependants come with 100,000 care workers. That is not sustainable in the longer term. That is why we are taking forward these measures. The hon. Lady mentioned specifically the Migration Advisory Committee, which has consistently said that migration is not the answer to workforce shortages in the social care sector. That is why the Government have invested £7.5 billion to support the strategy for social care workforce development and to boost capacity in social care, including through retention of the dedicated workforce already undertaking these vital roles. ...

**Lee Anderson (Conservative):** I welcome the news that the Ukrainian visa scheme has been extended by 18 months; that is very generous. Could the Minister confirm that while there is a war in Ukraine and while it is unsafe for these families to return, they will have a home in this country?

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** I know that my hon. Friend cares deeply about providing that sanctuary for our Ukrainian friends, as do I, colleagues across Government and, I would argue, Members across this House. We are all incredibly moved by what we have seen in our communities, with people rallying behind those Ukrainians to support them and to provide that warm welcome. We will continue to sustain that effort, which we do in partnership with the Ukrainian Government; we regularly discuss these matters with them. Of course, we will continue to sustain that sanctuary for the duration of this invasion. We are firmly on the side of the Ukrainians in winning this war. ...

**To read this very long question and answer session in full see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-20/debates/30170403-E9FD-4FF6-B977-5DC295F2B734/ImmigrationRulesAndBorderSecurity>

### **Asylum Seekers**

**Philip Hollobone (Conservative) [901565]** If the Church will have discussions with the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Church's guidance for clergy on supporting asylum seekers.

**Michael Fabricant (Conservative) [901567]** Whether the Church provides training for clergy on supporting asylum seekers wishing to convert to Christianity. (901567)

**Desmond Swayne (Conservative) [901569]** What guidance the Church issues for clergy on supporting asylum seekers wishing to convert to Christianity. (901569)

**Reply from Andrew Selous:** Both archbishops have offered to meet the Home Secretary, and the Church has provided advice and guidance for clergy to consider when dealing with requests for baptism from asylum seekers. The guidance refers to the need for discernment and recognises that there may be mixed motives on the part of asylum seekers requesting baptism.

**Philip Hollobone:** I welcome that meeting. Those who are genuinely seeking to convert to Christianity should of course be allowed to do so. But is my hon. Friend aware that there is growing concern in this country that the Church of England—naively at best, and deliberately at worst—is being seen to aid and abet asylum seekers in getting around the

laws of this country and remaining in the United Kingdom? May I urge the Church of England to update its guidance entitled “Supporting Asylum Seekers—Guidance for Church of England Clergy” as soon as possible to ensure that it is in alignment with new legislation passed in this House?

**Reply from Andrew Selous:** That guidance is being updated, so I can reassure my hon. Friend on that point. He is right that clergy will always rightly tell everyone they come across about the love of Jesus, but clergy do not determine asylum claims. Of course, priests are expected to uphold the law and make truthful representations of character. I hope that reassures him. I also note that in the recent *Times* investigation of 28 cases heard by the upper tribunal where a claimant cited conversion to Christianity as a reason to be granted asylum, only seven were approved, 13 were dismissed, and new hearings were ordered in eight other cases.

**Michael Fabricant:** ... The problem is, this brings the Church of England into disrepute. It implies that some vicars are naive, foolish and innocent. It is important for the credibility of the Church of England that training is more robust and that well-meaning folk do not endanger our society.

**Reply from Andrew Selous:** ... priests are required to use discernment, to recognise that there might be mixed motives, and always to put forward truthful representations of character.

**Desmond Swayne:** ... When there is plenty wrong and plenty to complain about, it is not always the case that we should blame the established Church, is it?

**Reply from Andrew Selous:** ... Any institution run by humans will never be perfect, but he is right that the Church of England was unfairly accused of being involved in some cases, when it had no involvement at all.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-22/debates/AD203511-6066-4001-A995-BB717B989FF0/AsylumSeekers>

*The guidance referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/supporting-asylum-seekers-guidance-for-church-of-england-clergy-161201.pdf>

*Information about the Times investigation referred to above can be read at*

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-judges-migrants-christianity-escape-deportation-jjn6xrwg0>

## UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answer: Ukraine

### Visas: Ukraine

**Stephen Kinnock (Labour)** [14598] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Written Ministerial Statement of 19 February 2024, HCWS258, on changes to the Immigration Rules, for what reasons the Government closed the Ukraine Family Scheme to new applications with immediate effect; how many applications to the Ukraine Family Scheme were awaiting a decision at the time of the closure of that scheme to new applications; and what his policy is on the processing of outstanding applications to the scheme made before 19 February 2024.

**Tom Pursglove:** We are rationalising the offer for Ukrainians coming to the UK to provide one single out-of-country route - Homes for Ukraine (HFU) - for all Ukrainians to apply to when seeking to come to the UK. The Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) was created as an immediate response to the Russian invasion and allowed UK based British citizens and settled persons to act as sponsors for their Ukrainian family members. We have closed the Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS) to new applications from 19 February. This will strengthen and improve the sustainability of the schemes we provide and additionally ensure consistency with

accommodation and safeguarding checks. Ukrainian nationals who may have previously been eligible to apply to come to the UK under the UFS will remain eligible to apply to the HFU sponsorship scheme.

The Government considered this departure from convention in closing the scheme with immediate effect to be justified and proportionate in order to maintain the orderly operation of the immigration system and to redirect applicants and sponsors to the Homes for Ukraine scheme without delay.

There are a small number of applications under the Ukraine Family Scheme outstanding and we aim to process these applications as soon as possible. Any application received prior to the closure of the Ukraine Family Scheme will be considered in-line with the rules in force on 18 February 2024.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14598>

*The statement referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-02-19/hcws258>

## UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answers: Other Immigration and Asylum

### Jobcentre Plus: Refugees

**Neil Coyle (Labour) [14600]** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps Jobcentre Plus takes to ensure that people with refugee status are recorded as such in its systems.

**Reply from Mims Davies:** DWP takes account of whether a claimant has refugee status when assessing their eligibility to claim benefits. In Universal Credit agents can also record relevant information on a claimant's profile to ensure they receive individualised tailored support, this could include that they are a refugee.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-19/14600>

### Asylum

**Gregory Campbell (DUP) [13912]** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether initial asylum decisions have been made for claims made before 28 June 2022.

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** In December 2022, the Prime Minister pledged to clear 92,601 legacy asylum claims (those lodged before the 28 June 2022) by the end of 2023. The Home Office not only cleared the equivalent 92,000 legacy asylum backlog, but exceeded it, processing over 112,000 cases in total.

Of the 112,138 initial asylum decisions, 86,800 of these decisions were made on legacy claims, with a further 25,338 decisions on flow claims. Please see [Statistics relating to Illegal Migration](#).

Around 4,500 legacy claims require further investigation. We will never compromise the integrity of the UK immigration system and will ensure that rigorous checks are made on these claims before decisions are made.

Indeed, since the end of December 2023, we have continued to make decisions on cases in the legacy backlog and will continue to do so. We will publish data on the number of outstanding decisions in the legacy cohort in the usual way.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/13912>

### Asylum

**Justin Madders (Labour) [13722]** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many asylum claims are subject to third party enquiries as of 8 February 2024.

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** This information is not held in a reportable format.



Some cases are more complex than others and require further investigation or matters that are outside of our control to be resolved. For example, some claimants have pending prosecutions which, if convicted, could lead to their asylum claim being refused and deportation action taken. The Government's view is that it is preferable not to consider asylum claims (and leave to remain) until a criminal prosecution case is completed.

The timetable for action in this scenario is dependent on the police or the courts, whose timings are rightly operationally independent of ministers. It is not possible to give an accurate answer for when they will be cleared, but we undertake regular reviews and will resolve these cases as soon as possible once the reason we cannot progress a claim is lifted.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-08/13722>

### **Asylum: Employment**

**Paula Barker (Labour)** [14281] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment his Department has made of the economic benefits of allowing asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting six months or more for an initial decision.

**Reply from Tom Purslove:** Asylum seekers who have had their claim outstanding for 12 months or more, through no fault of their own, are allowed to work. Those permitted to work are restricted to jobs on the Shortage Occupation List. This is based on expert advice from the independent Migration Advisory Committee. It is the Home Office's assessment that any analysis in this area is dependent on making assumptions from limited evidence and will therefore produce uncertain results.

Whilst we keep all policies under review, there are no immediate plans to change the existing policy, other than aligning it with the upcoming Immigration Salary List, which replaces the SOL. It is important that we distinguish between individuals who need protection and those seeking to work here who can apply for a work visa under the Immigration Rules. The Government has always been clear that asylum seekers do not need to make perilous journeys in order to seek employment in the UK. Those in need of protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach – that is the fastest route to safety.

Whilst there is mixed evidence that access to work in itself is a pull factor, it is reasonable to assume that this is one element in a range of factors that may drive illegal migration rather than use of legal routes to work in the UK. These routes include Skilled Worker, Global Talent, and Health and Care routes, which are supporting UK businesses to recruit workers with the skills and talent they need from around the world.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-16/14281>

### **Asylum: Temporary Accommodation**

**Neil Coyle (Labour)** [14091] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if his Department will take steps to halt evictions from temporary asylum accommodation for the full duration that a severe weather emergency protocol is active.

**Reply from Tom Purslove:** It has been agreed that the eviction or move on from asylum accommodation will pause for up to, but no more than three days, when Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is activated by a local authority and an individual does not have a housing offer from elsewhere.

The Home Office is working to ensure that individuals are offered support from Migrant Help or their partner organisation when they receive a decision on their asylum claim. This support includes providing advice on accessing the labour market, on applying for Universal Credit and signposting to local authorities for assistance with housing.

### **Cardington Airfield: Asylum**

**Alistair Strathern (Labour)** [14999] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the Cardington Sheds are being used to train border force staff for the removal of asylum seekers to Rwanda.

**Reply from Michael Tomlinson:** At present, Border Force staff are not being trained at the HOMES Training Facility in Bedfordshire, this facility is only being used for the purpose of training Immigration Enforcement officers and contracted escort officers.

Since 2015, the government has had training facilities to ensure escorts can respond professionally to the challenges of removing people with no right to be in the UK. This includes practical sessions, so escorts have the skills they need to deal with different scenarios.

As we continue to remove those with no legal right to be here, we will all ensure new escort officers will undertake required high quality training as necessary.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/14999>

## **UK Parliament, House of Lords Oral Answers**

### **Immigration Rules and Border Security**

**[The Minister's statement to the House of Commons](#) was read in the House of Lords.**

**Lord Coaker (Labour):** My Lords, there is yet more chaos at the borders as we learned yesterday of a failure to check hundreds of high-risk flights for the obvious threats of trafficking, serious crime and terrorism. The Government dispute the figures, so let me give them an opportunity to say whether all the high-risk flights were checked. ...

Instead of getting a grip, the Government sacked the inspector immediately when he was being forced to leave next month anyway. Some 15 of his reports remain unpublished, including revelations of visa failures in the care sector, with 275 such visas issued to a non-existent care home. When will these 15 reports, being sat on by the Home Office, be published, and when will there be a new independent inspector to oversee our borders and immigration arrangements? Border security is too important for confusion, delay and incompetence but, too often, that is what we get from this Government.

**Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom):** ... I can reassure anyone from the public who happens to be watching: Border Force performs checks on 100% of scheduled passengers arriving in the UK and risk-based intelligence-led checks on general aviation. It is disturbing that information with no basis in fact was leaked by the independent chief inspector to a national newspaper before the Home Office had the chance to respond. As a consequence, Mr Neal lost the confidence of the Home Secretary, as he pointed out in his WMS yesterday. I cannot really improve on his words: "I have terminated the appointment of David Neal, the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, after he breached the terms of appointment and lost my confidence".

In terms of the checks at London City Airport, Mr Neal was very aware of a specific issue with the recording of data there that meant that a large proportion of flights recorded as high risk should have been reclassified as low risk. As I have already mentioned, all notified general aviation flights are categorised as high risk or low risk based on a number of factors. These are primarily related to persons on board, but additional factors can relate to intelligence about the aircraft and other matters. A flight may be remotely cleared when it has been assessed using the risk assessment as low risk, and for high-risk flights in certain circumstances only. A

remote clearance requires, as a minimum, a digital record check on Home Office systems for all passengers. Where we are notified of a general aviation flight, we clear 100% of high-risk and low-risk flights remotely or in person, in accordance with the general aviation guidance.

I am not sure when the new replacement will be recruited. It is a very important position, and an appointment will be made following robust competition in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. As regards the publishing of the other reports, it is undeniably unfortunate that circumstances have delayed the publication of certain inspection reports. I will say that the one that was leaked was well within the time limit, and the Government had not been given an opportunity to respond and were still fact-checking, for the reasons I mentioned earlier. These will be published as soon as possible.

**Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat):** My Lords, why did the Government not follow the advice of the social care sector and ensure that only CQC-registered homes and businesses could accept social care workers? That would have helped overcome the problems. Will that be considered from now on? It is clearly important to the sector, which needs the employees, and everyone else.

Can the Minister also explain how Ukrainian family members whose own circumstances in Ukraine may include being bombed out of their homes, for example, will now no longer be able to join their families here under changes to the Ukrainian scheme?

Finally, the Minister referred to unpublished reports by David Neal, the former chief inspector. The Government may have been checking only the last one, but can the Minister explain why 15 reports have not been published and give us a date when they will be published by?

**Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** To answer the last question, I say that the date is soon. I am afraid that I cannot improve on that. They all require fact checking and a variety of other things. In terms of the Care Quality Commission, that is precisely what we are doing. It was made very clear the other day that, additionally, care workers in England will be able to sponsor migrant workers only if they are undertaking activities as regulated by the Care Quality Commission going forward. Ukrainian family members can still come. It is just that we are unifying the schemes currently in existence. The old family scheme allowed settled Ukrainian sponsoring family members to come here. That settlement used to have only a six-month qualification. They can still come under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The sponsors can now be British, Irish or settled in the UK, and that obviously includes family members. This scheme was greeted favourably and with some very positive comments from the Ukrainian embassy, which I am happy to recount if anybody would like to hear them.

**Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** My Lords, my wife and I drove trucks for our family business regularly through Calais to Dover, and we are very aware of the weaknesses in the systems and pressures from people smugglers attempting to come in through commercial vehicles, trucks and lorries. What is the increase in the number of checks done on those vehicles this year compared with last year, and what is the increase in the number of people found to have been smuggled or trafficked through those routes using trucks or lorries this year compared with last year?

**Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** I am afraid that I do not have the statistics on trucks. ...

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-21/debates/DB284385-728E-4E23-BFCF-28CB736503BF/ImmigrationRulesAndBorderSecurity>

## Press Releases

**UK's Rwanda asylum moves undercut core human rights protections - UN Human Rights Chief**

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/uks-rwanda-asylum-moves-undercut-core-human-rights-protections-un-human>

**Government extends stay for Ukrainians in the UK**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-extends-stay-for-ukrainians-in-the-uk>

**Conviction over small boat deaths in the Channel**

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/conviction-over-small-boat-deaths-channel>

## New Publications

**Asylum accommodation: Scottish Government letter to UK Government**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/asylum-accommodation-social-justice-secretary-letter-uk-government/>

**Human Trafficking: Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee's First Report**

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43435/documents/216051/default/>

**Updated: Migrants detected crossing the English Channel in small boats – last 7 days**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-last-7-days>

**Updated: Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: Visa data by country, upper and lower tier local authority**

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-visa-data-by-country-upper-and-lower-tier-local-authority>

## News: Rwanda Refugee Policy

**Rwanda plan will deal with asylum claim loophole, government says**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68331448>

**Minister claims he can guarantee flights to Rwanda before general election**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/michael-tomlinson-guarantee-flights-rwanda-election-b2498158.html>

**Flights carrying asylum seekers to Rwanda 'will leave as soon as law is passed'**

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/02/18/safety-rwanda-bill-flights-asylum-seekers-michael-tomlinson/>

## News: Channel Migrants

**Ibrahima Bah: Dinghy pilot guilty over Channel migrant deaths**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-68294191>

**The unprecedented case of a migrant manslaughter trial**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68297184>

**Police arrest Channel migrant smuggling ring in dawn raids across Germany**

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/21/channel-migrant-smuggling-ring-smashed-by-police/>

**Prosecutors target smuggled people who were forced to pilot small boats**

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/23/people-smuggling-gangs-small-boats-home-office-migration>

**Asylum seeker boat pilot detained for more than nine years over Channel crossing deaths**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/channel-france-english-channel-english-canterbury-crown-court-b2501472.html>

**Asylum seeker with home-made boat sentenced after four migrants die in Channel**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/asylum-seeker-boat-pilot-channel-ibrahima-bah-b2501477.html>

## News: Afghanistan

**Special forces blocked UK resettlement applications from elite Afghan troops**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68332923>

## News: Ukraine

**Ukraine family visa scheme closes to new applicants**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68335943>

**Britain winds down Ukraine refugee scheme — leaving families separated**

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ukraine-refugee-resettlement-scheme-visa-rules-uk-home-office-pgvttz7vh>

**Closure of UK family scheme for Ukrainians described as ‘cruel’ move**

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/19/closure-of-uk-family-scheme-for-ukrainians-described-as-cruel-move>

**MPs concerned that risk of homelessness among Ukrainians in UK likely to rise**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ukraine-war-ukrainians-homelessness-in-uk-b2501067.html>

## News: Other Immigration and Asylum

**David Neal: Immigration and borders watchdog sacked after critical news stories**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68354377>

**Home secretary sacks borders watchdog via Zoom after clash**

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/20/home-secretary-sacks-borders-watchdog-david-neal-via-zoom>



**Cleverly sacks border chief who spoke out on airport immigration 'security failings'**  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/02/20/james-cleverly-sacks-border-chief-immigration-security/>

**Home Office sacks immigration chief inspector after scathing criticism of border security**  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-david-neal-sacked-b2499399.html>

**Bas Javid: the man tasked with policing illegal immigration**  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/02/20/bas-javid-immigration-enforcement-rwanda-sajid-brother/>

**Robert Jenrick: We can learn from Trump on immigration**  
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/robert-jenrick-we-can-learn-from-trump-on-immigration-7wxdj2h5>

**Home Office accused of cover-up over 'golden visas' for super-rich Russians**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/24/home-office-accused-of-cover-up-over-golden-visas-for-super-rich-russians>

**Church of England recognises 'mixed motives' of asylum seeker conversions**  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/church-of-england-andrew-selous-christianity-church-commissioners-conservative-b2500723.html>

**Church of England set for 'urgent' review into asylum seeker policy**  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/24/church-of-england-urgent-review-asylum-seeker/>

**Yousaf urged to house more asylum seekers by Home Office**  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/scotland-james-cleverly-humza-yousaf-uk-government-home-office-b2498261.html>

**Scotland needs to rapidly increase migrant housing, say Tories**  
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scotland-needs-to-rapidly-increase-migrant-housing-say-tories-gc8n3d2rq>

**Scotland urged to use cruise ship to house asylum seekers**  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-68335659>

**SNP rejects Home Office plea to house migrants on ferries**  
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/snp-reject-house-asylum-seekers-ferries-uk-government-b656vkjwm>

**Asylum seekers speak out on 'shattered lives' as Scottish Refugee Council launches campaign to overhaul system**  
<https://www.scotsman.com/news/world/asylum-seekers-speak-out-on-shattered-lives-as-scottish-refugee-council-launches-campaign-to-overhaul-system-4521487>

**Police patrol rise after asylum homes vandalised**  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cyx71jkn1r4o>

**The social care visa is a trojan horse for mass migration**  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/20/the-social-care-visa-is-a-trojan-horse-for-mass-migration/>

**English test scandal: students wrongly accused of cheating launch legal action**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/19/english-test-scandal-students-wrongly-accused-of-cheating-launch-legal-action>

**All they want is the chance to clear their names': The English-language test scandal**  
<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/all-they-want-is-the-chance-to-clear-their-names-the-english-language-test-scandal>

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## Community Relations

### UK Parliament, House of Commons Oral Answers

#### Inter Faith Network Closure

**Stephen Timms (Labour):** Will the Minister make a statement about the closure that has been announced today of the Inter Faith Network?

**Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan):** ... As the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said during an Adjournment debate in January, we know full well the role that faith communities play in our society. We are extremely supportive of efforts by faith groups and others to bring together people of different faiths and beliefs.

The Secretary of State wrote to the co-chairs of the Inter Faith Network on 19 January this year to inform them that he was minded to withdraw the offer of funding for the 2023-24 financial year. This was because of the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain to the board of trustees of the IFN. As the House will be aware, successive Governments have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB. The appointment of an MCB member to the core governance structure of a Government-funded organisation therefore poses a reputational risk to the Government.

The Secretary of State invited the IFN to make representations on this matter, which it subsequently did. He carefully considered the points raised by the IFN before concluding that its points were outweighed by the need to maintain the Government's policy of non-engagement with the MCB, and the risk of compromising the credibility and effectiveness of that policy. Inter-faith work is valuable, but that does not require us to use taxpayers' money in a way that legitimises the influence of organisations such as the MCB.

The Department regularly reminds our partners, including the IFN, of the importance of developing sustainable funding arrangements rather than relying on taxpayers' money, which can never be guaranteed. The potential closure of the organisation is therefore a matter for the IFN, as an independent charity, and not the Government. The Government continue to be fully supportive of developing and maintaining strong relationships across faiths and beliefs.

**Stephen Timms:** Since 1987, the Inter Faith Network has been the UK's principal vehicle for inter-faith dialogue, supporting the annual Inter Faith Week, and activities and dialogue undertaken by inter-faith groups across the whole country. The network has been supported by Government funding for some 20 years. The IFN was told on 31 March last year, before the trustee appointment that the Minister referred to, that its funding would be ended from the following day. Why has the organisation been treated in that extraordinary way? Last July, the network received a letter from the Secretary of State to inform it that it

would, after all, receive funding for the current financial year. That promise has never been honoured. Why not?

... is it not extraordinarily stupid to be shutting down at this precise point our principal vehicle in the UK for Muslim-Jewish dialogue? Surely we need more, not to be shutting it down? Why has the Secretary of State not honoured the commitment that he made to me to meet me, the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and the noble Lord Singh to discuss this matter before making his decision, and will the Minister pay tribute and express thanks to the trustees and officers of the Inter Faith Network for the very important contribution that they have made to UK national life over the last 37 years?

**Reply from Felicity Buchan:** I truly believe that inter-faith work makes a good contribution to our society. My constituency is one of the most diverse in the entire country, and I have on a number of occasions brought together my mosque, my synagogue, Christian churches and my gurdwara. We recognise the benefits of inter-faith activity. I thank the Inter Faith Network for its work; however, we have always been clear with that organisation and any other organisation or charity that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funds that they need to put in place alternative sources of funding. As I said, the Government cannot fund this organisation when a trustee is part of the MCB.

**Theresa Villiers:** ... As we have heard, it looked in July as if the problem was resolved — at least for the financial year—so it is regrettable that we are in this position. I completely understand the importance of not engaging with organisations that have hard-line views, but surely we can find some compromise to keep the IFN in business, because it does incredibly valuable work to foster respect and mutual understanding between different faith groups.

**Reply from Felicity Buchan:** ... What has changed since July is the appointment in November of a trustee who is a member of the MCB. In terms of inter-faith work, there are so many examples of positive, thriving initiatives across the country that are bringing people together. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities funds a number of those partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions, which organise local-level inter-faith events to foster community cohesion. ...

**Liz Twist (Labour):** ... When was the decision to withdraw funding from the network made? What impact assessment was made, and what discussions were had about the vital need to continue to promote understanding about and between different faith groups, and to encourage co-operation? When was the Inter Faith Network notified of the decision? Does the Minister have plans to increase support for other groups to make up for any loss of provision arising from this decision?

Every Department will inevitably monitor and review the grants that they award, but the House should expect that to be done in the spirit of due process. As politicians, we have a responsibility to bring communities together. At a time when divisions are being exposed, I hope that the Minister can assure the House that the Government remain committed to inter-faith and multi-faith dialogue.

**Reply from Felicity Buchan:** ... Again, I stress the importance of inter-faith work. I see it in my own constituency; it is very important. The Government are already supporting other institutions that do such work.

The hon. Member asked specifically for timelines. The Secretary of State wrote to the IFN on 19 January saying that he was “minded to withdraw” the offer of funding in light of what we have discussed. He invited the Inter Faith Network to make representations to him on this matter, and he received its response on 22 January. After careful consideration of those representations, he confirmed that he wishes to withdraw the offer of funding to the Inter Faith Network for the reasons that we have discussed. He wrote to the co-chairs on 21 February to inform them of his decision. I stress again that the Department has been very clear that the Inter Faith

Network should have been developing other sustainable sources of funding.

**Bob Blackman (Conservative):** I am proud to represent the constituency in this country with the greatest adherence to religious faith, and many of those faiths are minority religions. We have a very strong inter-faith council that brings together people of all religions to sort out their differences and sort out tensions. I have had representations from the Jain community, the Zoroastrian community and others, expressing their concern that the majority religions—the larger religions in this country—will always be able to have their say because of their strength and power, but the minority religions will not. Given the Government's decision to withdraw funding from the Inter Faith Network, what is going to take the place of that important organisation that brings together people of all faiths, enabling them to settle their differences?

**Reply from Felicity Buchan:** ... DLUHC continues to fund a range of partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions; we believe in inter-faith work to strengthen community cohesion.

**Holly Lynch (Labour):** ... One of the things I find most concerning about how this decision has been handled is that, on occasion, journalists seem to have been in possession of letters from the Secretary of State to the Inter Faith Network at the same time as the IFN received them, or possibly before. That is no way to carry on. There has been very little attempt to have any serious conversations with the Inter Faith Network without those letters being in the public domain almost immediately. This work is more important now than ever before, so will the Minister think again about funding this organisation into the future? It is not too late.

**Reply from Felicity Buchan:** As I have said, very proper consideration went into this decision after we had heard representations from the Inter Faith Network. The decision on Government funding has now been made. We have always been clear that the Inter Faith Network needs to develop alternative sources of funding; institutions such as these cannot be solely reliant on Government funding. ...

**To read this very long question and answer session in full see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-22/debates/8A7AC494-0B10-4736-97FA-C4F3787A1C4E/InterFaithNetworkClosure>

*The Adjournment Debate referred to above can be read at*

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-10/debates/DDF93113-52B2-4777-91C3-E04D46E1C792/InterFaithNetworkForTheUK>

## UK Parliament, House of Lords Oral Answers

### Inter Faith Network

**[The Minister's statement in the House of Commons](#) was read in the Lords.**

**Baroness Sherlock (Labour):** ... Our country is strengthened by the richness and diversity of the faith traditions here, but the Government have a responsibility to help to facilitate positive relationships between different faith communities—all the more so in these difficult times.

We have now had some explanation of what has gone on here, but there are outstanding questions. First, funding for the current financial year was offered to the IFN last July, so can the Minister explain when the decision was taken to withdraw it and, crucially, whether the charity was told before the work being funded during this year had been undertaken? Secondly, have the Government made plans to make up for this loss of capacity by supporting other work facilitating relationships between faith communities?

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I can assure the noble Baroness that we have kept the IFN informed of every move that we have made on its funding issues, and it has had the chance to discuss them with us. As for other funding, I absolutely

agree with her that work facilitated and supported by government is really important for inter-faith work. I personally go and see a lot of inter-faith work going on, and we are still supporting more than 800,000 a year in organisations—people such as Near Neighbours and others that are doing this important work in our communities.

**Baroness Burt of Solihull (Liberal Democrat):** My Lords, whichever way you look at this, the optics are not good. It was news to me that the Government do not engage with the Muslim Council of Britain. Our group met its new, and first female, secretary-general only a few weeks ago. I have two questions for the Minister. First, this has been a long-standing non-relationship, promoted quite a few years ago; is it not time that the Government reviewed this non-relationship with the Muslim Council of Britain, particularly in the light of the current situation and the fact that it works with over 500 organisations to promote knowledge and understanding of the Muslim faith and counter islamophobia? Secondly, will the Government review this decision? It is petty, wrong-headed and counterproductive. It does not put the Government in a good light—but it could if the Government were prepared to review it.

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** My Lords, it is not just this Government; successive Governments of different colours have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB. British Muslims are a crucial part of Britain's history and our way of life in Britain today. Each and every Muslim in every community in every corner of the United Kingdom should know that their religion will never act as a barrier to achieving their ambitions. The Government recognise the discrimination and intolerance faced by British Muslims, particularly at this time. We will not tolerate anti-Muslim hatred in any form and will seek to stamp it out wherever it occurs. This does not mean, however, that the Government have to use public funds to support the influence of organisations such as the MCB. We have no plans to review this decision.

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench):** My Lords, I speak as a founder member of the Inter Faith Network back in the 1980s, when it was very difficult to get people of different religions into the same room to talk to each other. That initiative owed much to Brian Pearce, a former civil servant. The Inter Faith Network has done some remarkably good work, particularly in the celebration of the millennium and getting religion in the census. There has been a difficulty in this country in that there is a sort of rule that people cannot talk about religion—people from different religions would come together and talk about anything but the commonalities and differences in their religions. There has been movement in the direction of actually discussing the importance of commonalities and building on them. It is sad that this closure is happening at this time, especially as the reason given is that the board contains a member of the Muslim Council of Britain. It is not a proscribed organisation, and it is better to have people with different views talking together to move the country forward in respect for one another.

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I completely agree with the noble Lord that it is important that we have safe places where people of all faiths can discuss the issues surrounding faith and their relationships and to get together in communities. I thank him for his work, including in the early days of the Inter Faith Network. It was funded by the department from 2007 and we have given it £4 million since then. We have always said to it, however—as we say to any organisation that we fund—that it has to diversify its funding streams in order to become sustainable. No organisation can be reliant for ever on government funding, because we just do not know what is going to happen. I cannot reiterate the views of the Government again.

**The Lord Bishop of Worcester:** My Lords, I too pay tribute to the work of the Inter Faith Network. As has been stated, surely the optics of this are not good. I would like to ask the Minister how far non-engagement extends, because surely, in our society, we want to encourage dialogue, even with those organisations that may express some views with



which we disagree. To not be willing to engage at all with an organisation that has not been proscribed goes against all the efforts being made to bring our society together—it seems very strange.

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I do not particularly think it is strange. It is a long-standing decision not to engage with the MCB. The Government are doing what successive Governments have done. The person was on the council as a member, but it was when they became a trustee that things became more difficult for the Government.

**Baroness Butler-Sloss (Crossbench):** Since it has been a long-standing arrangement that the Muslim Council of Britain should not be regarded as an organisation that the Government talk to, would the Government now be prepared to review that?

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** I cannot say. Reviews like that are carried out by the Home Office. I will certainly take that back and ask the question but, as far as I know, there are no plans to look at it again.

**Lord Liddle (Labour):** Does the Minister think that the Government's action in this case is proportionate, given the huge importance in our society of interfaith dialogue and the fact that one person seems to be spoiling the show? Surely the Secretary of State would have a broader vision than that.

**Reply from Baroness Scott of Bybrook:** The Secretary of State carefully considered the implications of this and of ceasing the funding, including the potential impact on the Inter Faith Network itself and interfaith relations in the United Kingdom. The noble Lord is absolutely right: interfaith work is valuable, but there are very many more positive examples of thriving initiatives across the country that bring people together. That does not require us to use taxpayers' money in a way that legitimises the influence of organisations such as the MCB.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-22/debates/4AB267FF-1699-4B52-B5EE-DD9D8F5DA31F/InterFaithNetwork>

## UK Parliament Early Day Motion

**Wera Houbhouse (Liberal Democrat) [422] Closure of the Inter Faith Network** – That this House deeply regrets the Government's announcement that it will cut off funding to the Inter Faith Network; further regrets that this decision came despite new Government funding having been promised; notes with concern that islamophobia is rising and antisemitism in the UK is at the highest level on record; recognises the importance of inter faith dialogue at a time of heightened community tensions; further recognises the valuable work done by the Inter Faith Network and its branches around the country to bring communities together and nurture tolerance and understanding; further notes with concern that there is no organisation to take the Inter Faith Network's place; and urges the Government to reinstate funding to the Inter Faith Network.

<https://edm.parliament.uk/early-day-motion/61917>

## News

**Inter Faith Network for the UK Board Announces Closure of Charity due to Withdrawal of Government Funding**

<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/news/news-release-inter-faith-network-for-the-uk-board-announces-closure-of-charity-due-to-withdrawal-of-government-funding>

## Interfaith charity confirms closure after Government funding withdrawn

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/government-muslim-council-of-britain-stephen-timms-theresa-villiers-michael-gove-b2500919.html>

## Interfaith charity closes amid 'concerning' links to Muslim Council

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/24/interfaith-network-closes-links-muslim-council-britain/>

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## Equality

### UK Parliament, House of Lords Written Answer

#### Passports: Ethnic Groups

**Lord Blunkett (Labour)** [HL2182] To ask His Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Sharpe of Epsom on 31 January (HL1679), whether they plan to review the algorithms used in the automatic verification of passport photographs to ensure that they account for ethnic diversity, notwithstanding any direct human intervention.

**Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** The initial check to determine if a photo meets the internationally agreed standards for passports utilises an algorithm provided by a leading technology provider and, through extensive testing, this has been optimised to help best meet the needs of His Majesty's Passport Office and its customers. HM Passport Office is committed to making applying for a passport as simple as possible and will continue to evolve its photo checker as algorithmic technology improves.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-05/hl2182>

*The answer referred to above can be read at*

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-01-17/hl1679>

### Press Release

#### First black NHS matron, Beatles icon and pioneering ceramist to receive first official blue plaques outside London

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-black-nhs-matron-beatles-icon-and-pioneering-ceramist-to-receive-first-official-blue-plaques-outside-london>

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## Racism, Religious Hatred, and Discrimination

### UK Parliament House of Commons Ministerial Statement and Q&A

#### Antisemitism in the UK

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** ... Last week, the Community Security Trust published its latest report on antisemitic incidents. It made for deeply disturbing reading. It showed that there were 4,103 instances of anti-Jewish racist hatred recorded across the UK in 2023. That is the highest annual total ever reported to the Community Security Trust. It is a 147% rise from the 1,662 antisemitic incidents the

previous year, and 81% higher than the previous yearly record of 2,261 incidents, reported in 2021. Most shockingly, more than two thirds of the incidents reported last year occurred on or after 7 October, when Hamas perpetrated its barbaric terrorist attack on Israel. The report also indicates that antisemitism began spiking before Israel's military response had begun: the week immediately following 7 October saw 416 antisemitic incidents reported to the CST, which is higher than any subsequent week.

The CST's findings, which tally with increases in offending reported by the police, are nothing short of a disgrace and an outrage. Examples highlighted in the report are shocking and reprehensible. ... The only reasonable conclusion to draw is that members of Britain's Jewish community are suffering a level of hatred and abuse which is frankly shameful.

There is no excuse for the behaviour outlined in the CST report or seen in some of the shocking incidents that have occurred recently. The situation in the middle east does not and will never give anyone the right to harass or intimidate others. ... This Government will not stand for antisemitism of any kind. It is important to note that the police have comprehensive powers to deal with abhorrent conduct of this nature. For example, in the case of public order offences, where there is proof of racial or religious hostility on the part of the offender, offenders will be charged with racially or religiously aggravated versions of those offences, which will result in an uplift to their sentence. Furthermore, inciting racial hatred is an offence under the Public Order Act 1986 ...

We have been clear both before and since the 7 October attacks that we will do whatever it takes to keep Britain's Jewish community safe. We have taken strong steps to confront the poison of antisemitism head on. We have increased funding to bolster security at Jewish schools, synagogues and other sites. ...

The Community Security Trust is an essential partner in our efforts to keep the Jewish community safe, and I pay tribute to it for the brilliant work that it does. The Home Office meets regularly with CST staff and co-operates closely with them. We keep dialogue open constantly, and both the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have regular meetings with them. ...

*col 501* We are working closely with the police to ensure that hate crime and expressions of support for terrorist organisations are met with the full force of the law. The idea that anyone could celebrate or valorise Hamas for the appalling terrorist atrocities that it perpetrated on 7 October is beyond comprehension. It goes completely against the values of this country. Last month, we proscribed Hizb ut-Tahrir, an organisation that actively promotes and encourages terrorism and is responsible for spreading antisemitism. Hamas itself, of course, is already a proscribed organisation. ...

The right to protest is of course a fundamental part of our democracy, but that right cannot be exercised in a way that intimidates others or invokes fear in them. ... Where further powers are needed, we will not hesitate to act, which is why we recently announced a new package of measures to crack down on dangerous disorder—in particular, that committed at protests.

The CST's findings on incidents within the sphere of higher education were especially disturbing. No one should be subject to antisemitic abuse while at university. Every effort must be taken to prevent hatred from flourishing in schools, universities and colleges. That is why we announced a further £7 million of funding to help to tackle antisemitism in education.

We are equally unwavering in our stance towards hatred and abuse directed at British Muslims. The Government have been in regular contact with representatives of the Muslim community, and we are aware of an increased number of reports of anti-Muslim hatred as well. That is of course unacceptable, and we have made additional funding available for protective security measures at mosques and Muslim faith schools.

Last month, we marked Holocaust Memorial Day. Just as we remember the horrors of the past, we must remain alert to present-day dangers. Antisemitism is an ancient hatred,

which has reared its ugly head in the most abhorrent and evil ways throughout history. ... To the antisemites, we say this: "You will not win. You will be shown up for the despicable racists you are." To our Jewish friends and colleagues, I say this: "We stand with you. We understand your fears and we share your pain. We will protect you—today, tomorrow and always." ...

**col 502 Yvette Cooper (Labour):** ... The appalling and intolerable rise in antisemitism in Britain in recent months, as set out in the report of the Community Security Trust last week, is a stain on our society. ...

The more than 4,000 incidents in 2023 alone are an urgent reminder of the responsibility that we all have to stamp out the scourge of antisemitism wherever it is found. I join the Minister in thanking the CST for the remarkable and tireless work that it does each day, alongside the police, to keep our Jewish community safe. ...

We welcome and support the Government's commitment of additional funding for the CST. The incidents that it reports include a violent, abusive attack on a Jewish man on his way home from synagogue, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and a 200% increase in antisemitic incidents at universities. ... For the years they are studying, universities are students' homes. No one should ever feel unsafe in their home, or wherever they are. Everybody has the right to live in freedom from fear.

The CST's report also found the number of online incidents of antisemitism rising by 257%—an ancient hatred being resuscitated through modern means, to proliferate and promote extremism. I agree with the Minister that it is unconscionable that one of the steepest surges in antisemitism came in the week following Hamas's barbaric terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October—the deadliest day for Jews since the holocaust—with individuals in this country celebrating those scenes of unimaginable horror. There must be zero tolerance for the glorification of proscribed terrorist groups on Britain's streets. We support the proscribing of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and ensuring that those who commit antisemitic hate crimes always face the full force of the law.

In the weeks following 7 October, I met the CST together with Tell MAMA, which monitors Islamophobia and has also identified a huge increase in Islamophobic incidents and hate. They were united in their call for an end to hatred and prejudice, to antisemitism, and to Islamophobia. We must never allow the terrible events and conflicts in the middle east, which cause deep distress across our communities, to lead to increased tension, hatred, prejudice, abuse or crimes in our communities at home. I welcome the points that the Minister made about ensuring that extremist incidents on marches are also addressed with the full force of the law, but I press him to go further in a few key areas.

First, the counter-extremism strategy is now eight years out of date. ... The Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Government's own experts have warned that there is a gap in the law around hateful extremism that is allowing toxic antisemitic views and conspiracy theories to be spread, and making it harder to police them. ...

Will the Government also urgently look again at the decision that Ministers took around a year ago to downgrade the reporting of non-crime hate incidents, particularly around Islamophobia and antisemitism, to ensure that those who engage in vile and vitriolic religious hatred can always be properly monitored and identified by the police?

Finally, I ask particularly about online antisemitism ... We have seen a huge increase on X, formerly Twitter, at the same time as some of its monitoring and standards have been downgraded. Have the Government raised that directly with Elon Musk and X? ...

**Reply from Chris Philp:** ... I agree that it is completely unacceptable for people to seek to intimidate others, to incite racial hatred or to glorify terrorism. In fact, it is illegal. The police have made 600 arrests at protests since 7 October, and we in Government are urging the police to use all their powers to ensure that hatred is not incited in the course of the marches that have happened. ...

We are engaging with online platforms on a regular basis ...

The right hon. Lady asked about non-crime hate incidents. The changes to the

guidance were designed to ensure that minor spats between neighbours, or expressions of essentially legitimate political views, do not end up wasting police time by getting recorded. Where things do not meet the criminal threshold but might be useful in pursuing a criminal investigation later, they will still be recorded. ... Those things meet the criminal threshold and are therefore not affected by any change to non-crime hate incident recording rules in any event.

... just a week or two ago we announced various changes for which we intend to legislate via Government amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill ... Those measures will tighten up a number of areas relating to protest, including removing the “reasonable and lawful excuse” defence to various public order offences, making it easier for the police to have a blanket prohibition on face coverings, which are often menacing but also make it difficult to identify people committing criminal offences at protests. We will make it an offence to climb on key war memorials, which is grossly disrespectful ...

**Suella Braverman (Conservative):** ... The reality is that the Jewish community has been demonised and targeted, is scared and has been let down by the authorities. The Jewish community needs its champions and friends to speak in its defence without fear or favour. Lord Ian Austin, who sits in the other place, is one such courageous advocate who has campaigned for decades against antisemitism and Islamism. Does my right hon. Friend share my deep concern about organisations such as Midland Heart, which has suspended Lord Austin as its chair merely for his speaking against Islamism, terrorism and antisemitism?

**Reply from Chris Philp:** ... I agree with what she said about Lord Austin. I have read the tweets that he sent, and it strikes me that there is nothing unreasonable about them. He was criticising Islamism, which is a form of extremism. That is obviously not the same as the Muslim community more widely ... I do not think that the actions proposed by Midland Heart are in the slightest bit reasonable. ...

**Ronnie Cowan (SNP):** ... The sharp rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK is extremely concerning ...

In today’s statement, I see references to “funding to bolster security”, “caught and punished”, “the full force of the law”, and “a maximum of 14 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine”, none of which I disagree with in any way, shape or form. We need to implement the law robustly. However, I am a bit concerned that there is only one line in the statement that talks about education. It says that £7 million of funding will be delivered “in education”, but I would like it to say “through education”, because surely we can eradicate antisemitism through education. ... We value Scotland’s Jewish communities and other faith and belief communities. We recognise the important role that they play in making Scotland a safer, stronger and more inclusive society in which everyone can live in peace and work to realise their potential. In June 2017, the Scottish Government formally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism. ...

The Scottish Government’s recently published hate crime strategy sets out their strategic priorities for tackling hate crime, including antisemitism. ... It makes a number of commitments, including ensuring improved support for victims, improving data and evidence, and developing effective approaches to preventing hate crime. ...

**Reply from Chris Philp:** ... the Government announced a further £7 million of funding to help tackle antisemitism in education and ensure that support is in place for schools and colleges. In addition to that ... on 5 November the Department for Education announced a five-point plan to protect Jewish students on university campuses, which included a call for visas to be withdrawn from international students who incite racial hatred, asking vice-chancellors to act decisively against staff and students involved in antisemitism, and meeting the Office for Students, the independent regulator, to find out what more it can do to make it clear that



antisemitism and racial hatred incited on campuses should be referred to the police, and to explore an antisemitism charter in higher education. ...

**To read this very long question and answer session in full see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-19/debates/788C5AA8-47E6-4D42-916C-E569D0B260A5/AntisemitismInTheUK>

## UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answer

### Antisemitism

**Gregory Campbell (DUP)** [14814] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will ensure an urgent investigation of the anti-Semitic defacing of a birth certificate submitted to the Passport Office.

**Reply from Tom Pursglove:** The Home Secretary asked officials to urgently investigate this matter as soon as he became aware of this incident on 19 February. The incident is being taken extremely seriously. Home Office officials are working with commercial partners to complete the investigation and will ensure that appropriate action is taken.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-20/14814>

## UK Parliament House of Lords Ministerial Statement and Q&A

### Antisemitism in the UK

[\*The Minister's statement to the House of Commons was read in the Lords.\*](#)

**col 686 Lord Coaker (Labour):** My Lords, I thank the Government for the opportunity to discuss ... what the Government have had to say in response to the appalling levels of anti-Semitism detailed in the recent Community Security Trust reports. I know that we will all wish to thank it for the truly crucial work that it does, not only in monitoring anti-Semitism but in the physical protection that it provides for Jewish schools, synagogues and other community events. I have been to see its work myself, and it will always remain with me. In particular, there was the experience in a north London Jewish school: an alarm was sounded and we, staff and children automatically hid under desks or tables in case of a terrorist attack on the school. It was truly shocking. That was in London—in our country, in 2019, before the obvious increased tension now.

The CST reported over 4,000 individual incidents of hate crime against Jews in 2023, with 66% of those since 7 October. This is a 147% rise. Assault is up by 96%. Threats are up by 196%. Abuse is up by 149%. That is taking place in every part of the UK, as the report makes clear. ...

**col 687** The Government's Statement also draws attention, quite rightly, to the shocking and totally unacceptable increase in abuse and hatred of Muslims, as highlighted by Tell MAMA and others. Funding has been made available for security at Muslim schools and mosques. Can the Minister tell us how much and how it is being distributed? ...

Will the Government look again at their decision to downgrade the reporting of non-crime hate incidents, which particularly affects the recording of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia? How is it that anti-Semitism can seemingly flourish online and remain there? ...

We all agree that abuse, discrimination and hatred have no place in our society. ...

**col 688 Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Liberal Democrat):** ... I welcome the comments on and compliments to the Community Security Trust ... It does an incredible job, not only on the statistics on which we base a lot of our information but in the security it presents to the Jewish community in the UK. ...

... Israel had not yet responded on 7 October but there were 31 incidents of anti-Semitism

in the UK that day. This continued until it peaked on 11 October, with 80 incidents in the UK. The week following 7 October saw 416 anti-Semitic incidents. The speed and number of these incidents on or after 7 October appear to show that this increase in anti-Jewish hate—that is what it is—was a celebration of Hamas’s attack. ... The subsequent response has added fuel to the flames. ...

*col 689* I understand what is sometimes behind many of the people on the marches which take place—a horror at the Palestinians’ suffering in Gaza. I sympathise with and understand that. But I must say that, as an Orthodox Jew in the UK, I am reminded somewhat of the Duke of Wellington’s comment “I don’t know what effect they will have on the enemy but by God they frighten me”. ... At the moment, there are Jewish parents who are not sending their children to their Jewish schools because they are frightened. If they are sending them, they are telling them not to wear the school blazers or their yarmulkes—their head covering—because it will identify them. This is the UK, this is the country we live in, and this is not how it should be. ...

**Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom):** ... Anti-Semitism is deplorable, and it is worse now than I have ever known it.

I turn to the late, great Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, formerly of your Lordships’ House, for some words to sum up my feelings on this. ...

“Jews cannot fight antisemitism alone. The victim cannot cure the crime. The hated cannot cure the hate. It would be the greatest mistake for Jews to believe that they can fight it alone. The only people who can successfully combat antisemitism are those active in the cultures that harbour it. Antisemitism begins with Jews, but it never ends with them. A world without room for Jews is one that has no room for difference, and a world that lacks space for difference lacks space for humanity itself”. I think that is very powerful. ...

*col 691* ... Tell MAMA ... has been supported by DLUHC to the tune of £6 million, I think, since its inception. ...

That the police are fully aware of their powers has been repeatedly demonstrated, most recently with respect to a convoy planned from the north of England to north London, many parts of which have Jewish communities. The police stopped that convoy because they were concerned it would inflame tensions and engage in intimidatory behaviour. Under Sections 12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 the police have powers to impose conditions on protests to prevent specific consequences, including serious public disorder, serious disruption to the life of the community or intimidation. The police can impose any condition they deem necessary to prevent these harms occurring and have made repeated use of these powers—for example, to prohibit protests outside the Israeli embassy and to ensure that vulnerable communities are protected.

The recent protests have seen a small minority dedicated to causing damage and intimidating the law-abiding majority. We respect the right to protest, which we regard as paramount in our country, but dangerous behaviour must not be tolerated. ...

*col 692* As regards non-crime hate incidents, the Government introduced a new code of practice to make the processes surrounding the recording and retention of personal data subject to stronger safeguards. The code better protects the right to freedom of expression, while respecting the operational importance of NCHI recording for the police in protecting vulnerable people and communities from harm. However, the code makes it clear that instances that include personal data can and should be recorded if the event presents a real risk of significant harm and if there is a real risk that future criminal offences may be committed. We would like to make it absolutely clear that the code relates only to non-crime hate incidents; it does not amend the hate crime framework in any way, shape or form. ...

The Government have worked with the police to fund True Vision, which is an online hate crime reporting portal, designed so that victims of hate crime do not have to visit a police station to report. ...

**col 693 Lord Mann (Non-affiliated):** ... In my view, there is a sinister change in what is going on with anti-Semitism beyond the noise, which is bad enough: it is the very specific, organised and co-ordinated targeting of individual Jewish people, at work and in their accommodation, in ways that we have never seen before. I do not mean awful random violent acts of anti-Semitism, which of course are dangerous and threatening for all of us and something that we need to deal with, but the co-ordinated targeting of people, isolating them and organising pile-ons to force them out of workplaces—in some cases off student courses and in other cases out of accommodation, but particularly from the workplace. That co-ordination is something that we have not seen in this country. ...

**Reply from Lord Sharpe of Epsom:** ... I completely agree. ...

**col 694 Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated):** ... We almost cannot describe how serious the mood is at the moment. This is a serious time, historically, in terms of anti-Semitism, and this is not just some rhetorical flourish. I want to have that on record. ...

**col 695** A much smaller incident that I would like the Minister to comment on is one that cheered me up. It might sound minor, but, after the unpleasant incident earlier this week of the Star of David necklace on the statue of Amy Winehouse being covered up ... it was so shocking, even though it seemed so small—I was pleased to see that a non-Jewish member of the public had gone out of their way to skive off work and scrape off the sticker from the statue. I know that because it was reported by the group Our Fight, a new grass-roots campaign of non-Jews challenging British anti-Semitism, which was set up after 7 October.

Would the Minister agree on the importance of such solidarity, which cuts across identity politics and all sorts of party tribalism? ...

**Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative):** ... I was talking to a beauty journalist yesterday and she was telling me of the tweets going around about beauty products, telling people not to buy from certain businesses as they are owned by a Jewish person and not to buy from certain businesses as they are owned by a person who supports Israel. It is biting, and it is not just beauty products but clothing products and any Jewish business. This is truly shocking. This last happened 70 years ago. It is spiralling out of control. Jewish businesses are being targeted because they are owned by Jewish people, and people are responding to it. ...

**To read this very long question and answer session in full see**

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-21/debates/67AE80B8-12CB-4EC5-B59D-5D9D6B729FC7/Anti-SemitismInTheUK>

*The CST report referred to above can be read at*

[https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic\\_Incidents\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf)

*The Educate Against Hate website, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.educateagainsthate.com/>

*The Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice, referred to above, can be read at*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible>

*The True Vision hate crime reporting portal referred to above can be read at*

[https://www.report-it.org.uk/your\\_police\\_force](https://www.report-it.org.uk/your_police_force)

### Hate Crimes

**Baroness Hussein-Ece (Liberal Democrat):** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of any increase in the number incidents of race and faith-based hate crimes, and whether they intend to introduce a new hate crime action plan.

**Reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (Baroness Penn):** My Lords, hate crimes recorded by the police decreased by 5% last year. This reflects the crime survey statistics, which show a decline in hate crime reported over the last 15 years. Since 7 October, British Jews and Muslims have reported incidents in increased numbers. This is unacceptable, and we continue to work closely with communities. We are not intending to publish a hate crime strategy. We remain committed to cutting crime and protecting all communities.

**Baroness Hussein-Ece:** My Lords, I thank the Minister for that response, but, as she said, hate crime has spiked very recently, and we know that hate crimes are chronically underreported in the UK and that many victims feel disempowered by existing reporting services. In the Government's last hate crime action plan of 2016, they pledged to increase the reporting of hate crimes and encourage more people from under-reported groups to come forward. What is happening about that? Can the Minister tell the House whether this work has been reviewed in the last eight years and whether reporting and prosecutions have indeed improved? Will the Government introduce a comprehensive strategy to ensure vulnerable groups feel protected and supported in law?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, we have seen an increase in reporting and recording of hate crime over the last decade or so. There has been a small decrease in the last year, but, overall, that is partly reflective of the fact that we have put additional efforts into encouraging people to come forward. That includes through supporting charities such as the Community Security Trust but also Tell MAMA, which we fund, which is an organisation that focuses on anti-Muslim hatred and provides a different route by which people can report crimes and incidents and then get the appropriate support.

**Lord Leigh of Hurley (Conservative):** ... I am president of Westminster Synagogue. This Saturday, we had 20 policemen and four vans to protect us as a demonstration went past Knightsbridge. Does my noble friend agree that these demonstrations, with anti-Semitic slogans and rhetoric calling for genocide against the State of Israel, need to be controlled and curtailed so that British Jews can once again feel safe and secure in the streets of London?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, I think my noble friend's experience bears out the statistics that we saw announced by the Community Security Trust last week, showing the highest number of reported anti-Semitic incidents on record in 2023, with the majority of these being reported from 7 October. There is no place on British streets for demonstrations, convoys or flag-waving that glorify terrorism or harass the Jewish community, and we will work closely with the police, who we urge to step up patrols and use all available powers to enforce the law.

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon (Crossbench):** My Lords, the current practice of giving government funding to more vocal communities to collect figures to show that they are more hated than others is a waste of that funding. Does the Minister agree that a better approach would be to tackle the underlying ignorance on which prejudice thrives by stressing, in the teaching of RE in schools and elsewhere, the large number of important ethical commonalities between different faiths to show that the superficial differences are very insignificant?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, the Government committed to break down the recording of hate crime first by religion and then more recently by race. That

provides us with an important insight into the experiences of different communities, which can be quite different across the country. Where I agree with the noble Lord is that part of the solution to some of these issues is focusing on where we have more in common than what divides us. We should emphasise that, particularly in our schools.

**The Lord Bishop of Chichester:** My Lords, this is an extremely difficult time, in which we hear profoundly disturbing reports of the rise in race and faith-based hate crimes. Tomorrow, the board of the UK's Inter Faith Network will meet to confirm its closure following the withdrawal of funding by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This comes at a time when we urgently need to promote interfaith dialogue and the expansion of religious literacy in schools, as has been mentioned, and elsewhere. What assessment have His Majesty's Government made of the impact of the closure of the Inter Faith Network, and what will replace it?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, the Government fund a number of organisations to work in the space. On the Inter Faith Network specifically, the Secretary of State decided to withdraw the offer of funding for this year due to the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain to the board of trustees of the IFN. Successive Governments have had a long-standing policy of non-engagement with the MCB.

Therefore, the appointment of an MCB member to the core governance structure of a government-funded organisation informed that decision.

**Lord Turnberg (Labour):** My Lords, following the previous question, would it not be helpful if the leadership of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities made a joint statement about how abhorrent racial hatred really is?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** I know of many efforts across the country, locally and nationally, to bring leaders of different faiths together and make statements of unity. That is something the Government continue to support.

**Baroness Deech (Crossbench):** My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Mann, issued a report on anti-Semitism not long ago which made very useful recommendations, including teaching about anti-Semitism and Jewish history in school. Would that not be a far better approach than focusing entirely on Holocaust education, which places everything in the past, far away, nothing to do with us today?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, one of the most recent announcements from the Government in this area is indeed additional funding through the Department for Education to schools to increase education around this area. That is something the DfE is taking forward.

**Lord Kamall (Conservative):** My Lords, when the Government look at their hate crime strategy, how much of it do they think they can achieve in a top-down way from central government, and how much can they achieve in working with local community organisations, so that it is a bottom-up approach to tackling hate crimes?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My noble friend is absolutely right that working at a local level is key to giving people more confidence in reporting, but it is also really important in thinking about solutions to these issues. One of the things that my department has been doing, in particular since 7 October, is regular engagement with local authorities to understand what is going on in their area, examples of best practice we can help share, and any particular issues that they are aware of that we can provide more support on.

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage (Labour):** My Lords, news reports this week of a baby's passport application being returned from the Home Office to its parents with its birthplace, Israel, scribbled out and the application torn, and a statue of Amy Winehouse being defaced with a Palestinian flag sticker placed over her Star of David, are more evidence of the increase in anti-Semitic incidents reported by the CST. The Government's downgrading of recording of non-crime hate incidents limits the police's ability to monitor



and prevent escalation within communities. Can the Minister tell the House whether the Government will support Labour's plan to reinstate full collection details for all hate incidents?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, I have not had the same feedback as the noble Baroness. As I say, it was this Government that brought in the disaggregation of hate crimes by different religions to help provide insight into the experience of different communities. We provide ongoing support and funding to the CST in its work, and we have regular engagement with the police to understand what the picture is in local areas. I will look at the issue the noble Baroness raises, and also understand from the feedback and conversations we have what impact that has. ...

**Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-affiliated):** My Lords, will the Minister acknowledge that there are real problems in terms of legislating against hate as a crime, because it can be used to silence opposition? One of our fellow Peers has recently been accused of, and in fact punished for, bigotry, when bad-faith activists wilfully labelled a tweet against Islamists—that is Hamas—as Islamophobic. Conversely, while I consider that the virulent rhetoric and abuse directed at Zionism is often—usually—thinly disguised anti-Semitism, the same legitimate criticism of Israel is being curtailed. Should we avoid using the law, and instead argue back and condemn loudly?

**Reply from Baroness Penn:** My Lords, we have both systems in place. We fully support lawful freedom of speech; it generates rigorous debate and is incredibly important to our society. But it is not an absolute right, and does not include the right to harass others or incite them to violence or terrorism. It is possible to both have in place laws against hate crime while protecting and respecting freedom of speech. Sometimes the implementation of that is a carefully balanced judgment, and that is something we all need to take care with.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-21/debates/BF2CF250-895F-44F8-BACA-1D824A464C93/HateCrimes>

*The Hate Crime Action Plan referred to above can be read at*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f8db94a8fa8f56ad07d1152/2016\\_Hate\\_Crime\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f8db94a8fa8f56ad07d1152/2016_Hate_Crime_Action_Plan.pdf)

*The CST statistics referred to above can be read at*

[https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic\\_Incidents\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/f/Antisemitic_Incidents_Report_2023.pdf)

*Lord Mann's reports referred to above can be read at*

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Understanding-Jewish-Experience-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

*and*

<https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/A-Good-Practice-Guide.pdf>

## News

**Anti-Muslim cases surge in UK since Hamas attacks, charity finds**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-68374372>

**Greatest Rise in Reported Anti-Muslim Hate Cases to Tell MAMA since Oct 7th**

<https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

**Sharp rise in anti-Muslim hatred in UK 'with women bearing brunt'**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/islamophobia-muslims-hamas-israel-gaza-racism-b2500757.html>

**Anti-Muslim hatred in UK has tripled since Hamas attacks**

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anti-muslim-hatred-in-uk-has-tripled-since-hamas-attacks-fp689kcxy>

**Lee Anderson: MP suspended from Tory party over 'Islamists' comments**

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-68392621>

**Lee Anderson has Tory whip suspended over Sadiq Khan Islamist claim**

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24142046.lee-anderson-tory-whip-suspended-sadiq-khan-islamist-claim/>

**Tory minister says Lee Anderson just 'used the wrong words' as Sunak fails to condemn anti-Muslim rant**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/rishi-sunak-lee-anderson-khan-gb-news-b2502107.html>

**Protesters close Tower Bridge as Lee Anderson suspended over 'Islamists' comment**

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/lee-anderson-should-lose-whip-for-sadiq-khan-jibe-says-labour-sgddwrgtt>

**Bob Stewart: MP's racially aggravated offence conviction quashed**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68384941>

**Former Tory MP Bob Stewart has racial abuse conviction quashed**

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/02/23/tory-mp-bob-stewart-conviction-overturned-crown-court/>

**MP Bob Stewart wins appeal against racial abuse conviction**

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/23/mp-bob-stewart-wins-appeal-against-racial-abuse-conviction>

**Islamists and the hard left got me sacked — I'm not the real racist**

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sacking-me-is-wrong-this-madness-over-a-hamas-tweet-has-to-stop-r2cvq22tm>

**Ancient evil of anti-Semitism is contaminating modern Britain**

<https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/viewpoint/24129496.ancient-evil-anti-semitism-contaminating-modern-britain/>

**Sadiq Khan warns Met has moved 'backwards' since Stephen Lawrence murder and says racism is 'worryingly real'**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sadiq-khan-metropolitan-police-racism-stephen-lawrence-b2501451.html>

**Institutional racism isn't fake or woke – it's worryingly real**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/stephen-lawrence-macpherson-report-institutional-racism-b2501497.html>

**Runnymede Trust statement on rising anti-semitism and Islamophobia**

<https://twitter.com/RunnymedeTrust/status/1759624541217734957>

## Black members' committee boycotts UCU over 'entrenched racism'

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/black-members-committee-boycotts-ucu-over-entrenched-racism>

## First black female deacon in fight to keep job and parish

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/first-black-female-deacon-in-fight-to-keep-job-and-parish-2l5fsb2z8>

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## Other UK Parliament and Government

### UK Parliament, House of Commons Written Answers

#### Coroners: Birmingham and Solihull

**Tahir Ali (Labour)** [13612] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, on how many occasions a body was released more than seven days after the coroner's office was notified in (a) Birmingham and (b) Solihull in each of the last 12 months; and whether the coroner (i) collects information on someone's religion and (ii) takes into account the timeframe for religious beliefs and practices relating to death and dying.

**Reply from Mike Freer:** Information is not held centrally on the release by coroners of the bodies of the deceased whose deaths are reported to them.

Coroners are judges and, as such, are independent in the decisions they make in conducting their investigations. They exercise their judicial discretion in accordance with the relevant statutory and regulatory framework.

The Chief Coroner has issued a suite of Guidance to assist coroners with the law and their legal duties, and to provide advice on policy and practice. His [Guidance No.28](#) on Decision Making and Expedited Decisions is intended to be a practical guide to assist coroners in situations where a bereaved family has made a request to the coroner for urgent consideration of the death of a loved one and/or early release of their body; or where the coroner or coroner's officers otherwise become aware of features of a particular death which may justify treating it as especially urgent.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-07/13612>

#### Youth Custody

**Janet Daby (Labour)** [13385] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many young people aged 18 or over from each (a) ethnic group and (b) religion were in the youth estate as of 31 December 2023.

**Reply from Edward Argar:** The latest 12-month period for which data are available is 01 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. During that period, 56 young people aged 18 or over in the youth secure estate were separated for more than seven days. All of these were in young offender institutions.

In making the above calculation, the following rules were applied:

- Where a period of separation began before 01 April 2022, the full duration of the separation has been counted.
- Where a period of separation began before 31 March 2023, it is deemed to have ended on 31 March 2023 for the purpose of this calculation.
- The data provided relate to continuous periods of separation of more than seven days.
- If a new period of separation began within five days of a previous period of separation's ending, it is deemed to be a single continuous period of

separation.

- Young people aged 17 when their separation began, but who turned 18 more than seven days before the separation ended have been counted.

On 31 December 2023, there were 153 young people aged 18 or over in the youth estate. Details of their ethnicity and religious affiliation are provided in the following tables.

Number of 18+ year olds by ethnic group, December 2023

	Number of 18+ year olds
Asian	8
Black	48
Mixed	22
Not Known	*
Other	*
White	69
Grand Total	153

Note: The symbol \* is used for suppressed values of five or fewer, to prevent disclosure in accordance with data protection principles. Zero figures are not suppressed.

Number of 18+ year olds by religious group, December 2023

	Number of 18+ year olds
No Religion	24
Christian	55
Muslim	22
Other religion	10
Religion not stated	42
Grand Total	153

As of 06 February 2024, the oldest young person accommodated in the youth estate was 18 years old.

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2024-02-06/13385>

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## **Cost of Living**

### **Scottish Government Website**

#### **Help during the cost of living crisis**

Most households are concerned about the cost of living, with worries about issues such as rent and mortgages, food and utility bills, energy costs, and debt.

In response, the Scottish Government has launched a new website that provides information to help people access support with

- Energy and Bills
- Benefits and Income
- Children and Families
- Debt and Money
- Health and Wellbeing

Your local council might be able to help if you need urgent help with money, food or fuel –

contact the council for information.  
<https://costofliving.campaign.gov.scot/>

## News

**Typical energy bill to fall £238 a year from April under new price cap**  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-68353627>

**From starving students to emaciated pets: why are hunger and poverty the UK's new normal?**  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/20/from-starving-students-to-emaciated-pets-why-are-hunger-and-poverty-the-uks-new-normal>

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## Other News

**Apply for a free defibrillator for your community**  
*Closing date for applications: 28 February 2024*  
<https://www.bhf.org.uk/how-you-can-help/how-to-save-a-life/defibrillators/apply-for-a-free-defibrillator-for-your-community>

**Campaign launched to support more victims of crime**  
<https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2024/february/campaign-launched-to-support-more-victims-of-crime/>

**Coming soon: changes to charity law and the way the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator regulates**  
<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/coming-soon-changes-to-charity-law-and-the-way-we-regulate/>

**Does your charity own land and property in Scotland?**  
<https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/does-your-charity-own-land-and-property-in-scotland/>

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## Bills in Progress \*\* new or updated this week

### Scottish Parliament

**Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill**  
<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>

**Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill**  
<https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/police-ethics-conduct-and-scrutiny-scotland-bill>

### UK Parliament

**Asylum Application (Entry to the United Kingdom) Bill**  
<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3530>



## **Asylum Seekers (Permission to Work) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3627>

## **The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023 [Draft]**

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348253191/contents>

## **\*\* Family Visas (Minimum Income) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3684>

First Reading, House of Commons

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-19/debates/8F9DF324-CAD8-420A-8B88-5B956C22CC47/PointsOfOrder#contribution-3A51943A-4D47-423A-BB77-383A8CED357B>

## **Housing Standards (Refugees and Asylum Seekers) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3618/stages>

## **\*\* Illegal Immigration (Offences) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3649>

Bill as introduced

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0130/230130.pdf>

## **Immigration and Nationality Fees (Exemption for NHS Clinical Staff) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3660>

## **\*\* Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3540>

Committee Stage, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-19/debates/69F06855-C925-4753-9277-D92C1BEB6CD0/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-19/debates/69F06855-C925-4753-9277-D92C1BEB6CD0/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

and

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-19/debates/767CA9FE-AFA4-453E-8F7A-0CFB300E8F2C/SafetyOfRwanda\(AsylumAndImmigration\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-19/debates/767CA9FE-AFA4-453E-8F7A-0CFB300E8F2C/SafetyOfRwanda(AsylumAndImmigration)Bill)

Amendment Paper

<https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/54356/documents/4473>

## **Scottish Law Officers (Devolution) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3665>

## **Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Draft Bill**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/terrorism-protection-of-premises-draft-bill-overarching-documents>

## **Workforce Information (Ethnicity) Bill**

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3522>

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## Consultations

\*\* new or updated this week

**\*\* closes this week!**

**Democracy Matters** (closing date 28 February 2024)

<https://consult.gov.scot/local-government-and-communities/democracy-matters/>

**Health and Social Care Workforce – Help Us to Tackle Racism** (closing date extended to 4 March 2024)

<https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/7K3359S>

**Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill** (closing date 6 March 2024)

[https://yourviews.parliament.scot/sppa/scottish-elections-bill/consult\\_view/](https://yourviews.parliament.scot/sppa/scottish-elections-bill/consult_view/)

**Your Police 2023-2024** (closing date 31 March 2024)

<https://consult.scotland.police.uk/strategy-insight-and-innovation/your-police-2023-2024/>

**Ending conversion practices in Scotland** (closing date 2 April 2024)

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-conversion-practices-scotland-scottish-government-consultation/>

**ITV/Tell MAMA survey on mosque safety in the UK** (closing date not stated)

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/V7V5B6L>

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## Job Opportunities

[Click here](#) to find out about job opportunities.

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## Funding Opportunities

\*\* new or updated this week

**\*\* closes this week!**

**Refugee Festival Scotland**

*Closing date: 1 March 2024*

Scottish Refugee Council grants of up to £750 to help deliver arts and cultural events as part of Refugee Festival Scotland. Any event is welcome, from art, film, music, dance and discussion to sport, storytelling, theatre, cookery demonstrations, creative workshops, community-get-togethers and family-friendly picnics. For information see

<https://www.refugeefestivalscotland.co.uk/get-involved/funding/>

**Alwaleed Community Grant Scheme**

*Closing date: 11 March 2024*

Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World funding of up to £5,000 for projects which engage with the following themes: Interfaith and intra-faith relations, Islam and the environment, Education and skills development, and Digital Islam. For information see

<http://tinyurl.com/4atszf5m>

**Ethnic Minority Development Fund**

*Closing date: 15 April 2024*

National Lottery Community Fund grants from £500 to £15,000 for projects run by ethnic minority-led third-sector organisations in Scotland that bring ethnic minority people together and build strong relationships across communities, help more ethnic minority people to be the best they can be, by supporting them as soon as possible, or improve places and spaces that matter to ethnic minority communities. For information see <https://cemvoscotland.org.uk/emdf/>

### **Cost-of-Living Support Scotland**

*Application deadline not stated*

National Lottery funding from £10,001 to £75,000 for projects to help support individuals, families and communities currently experiencing hardship as a result of the cost-of-living increases. The programme aims to fund activity that reduces the impact of, or prevents financial insecurity so that people have more resilience and are more able to identify ways to deal with the impact of increased cost of living in their lives, are able to shape activity in their community to address the increased cost-of-living, and have more access to support and services that will help them to deal with the increased cost of living. For information and to apply see

<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/programmes/cost-of-living-support-fund>

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## **Events, Conferences, and Training**

\*\* new or updated this week

### **How To Be a Political Commentator - Broadcast Media Training for Women of Colour**

8 March 2024 (Glasgow, 10.30–5.30)

Pass the Mic and Women in Journalism Scotland are working together to host a media commentator training day exclusively for women of colour who are based in Scotland. The purpose of the day is to give you a chance to experience giving interviews on radio and TV. You will meet journalists and presenters, and lunch will be provided. For information see <https://passthemicscotland.org/2024/01/20/media-commentator-training/>

### **Rights of Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

13 May 2024 (Glasgow, 10.00–12.30)

PAIH course explore how the asylum system works from the perspective of a claimant and the process involved in making a claim for asylum. The course also explores the journeys and barriers faced by both refugees and asylum seekers reaching and building a new life in Scotland and their respective entitlement to services. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

### **Rights and Entitlements of EEA Nationals**

15 May 2024 (Glasgow, 10.00–12.30)

PAIH course to find out about fundamental issues of housing, homelessness and welfare entitlements of EEA nationals and look at how service users might prepare themselves for an economy in recession and cost of living spiralling. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

### **No Recourse To Public Funds**

22 May 2024 (Glasgow (10.00–12.30)

PAIH course to help frontline workers identify a tenant's current status, clarify what this means in terms of access to public funds and plan effective support where difficulties arise. For information see <https://www.paih.org/what-we-do/migrants-rights-courses>

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## Useful Links

**Scottish Parliament** <http://www.parliament.scot/>

**Scottish Government** <https://www.gov.scot/>

**UK Parliament** <http://www.parliament.uk/>

**GovUK (links to UK Government Departments)** <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations>

**One Scotland** <http://onescotland.org/>

**Scottish Refugee Council** <http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk>

**New Scots** <https://newscots.scot/>

**Refugee Survival Trust** <https://www.rst.org.uk/>

**Freedom from Torture** <https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>

**Interfaith Scotland** <https://interfaithscotland.org/>

**Equality and Human Rights Commission** <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en>

**Equality Advisory Support Service** <http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>

**Scottish Human Rights Commission** <http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/>

**ACAS** <http://www.acas.org.uk/>

**SCVO** <https://scvo.org.uk/>

**Volunteer Scotland** <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/>

**Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)** <https://www.oscr.org.uk/>

**Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel** <https://www.goodfundraising.scot/>

**Disclosure Scotland** <https://www.mygov.scot/disclosure-types>

**Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services**

<https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/disclosure-services/>

**BBC News** <https://www.bbc.com/news>

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**SCoJeC**  
Scottish Council of  
Jewish Communities

Representing, connecting, and supporting Jewish people in Scotland



The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation SC029438) <https://www.scojec.org/>



**BEMIS** is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and building the capacity of minority third sector community organisations. As a strategic partner with Government, it is proactive in influencing the development of race equality policy in Scotland, and helps develop and progress multicultural Scotland, active citizenship, democracy, and Human Rights Education at the Scottish, UK, and European levels. (Scottish Charity, no. SC027692) <http://www.bemis.org.uk/>



The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism. <http://www.gov.scot/>

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