

Letter to Yvette Cooper MP

Join us in calling for urgent action to keep children safe on the UK-France border - use the following template to send an email to: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

Dear Home Secretary,

Keeping children safe at the UK-France border

I am writing in response to your comments on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme on Friday, 4th July 2025. You expressed concern for children crossing the Channel and spoke of plans to criminalise others making the journey in order to "keep the children safe."

I share your concern for the safety of children at the UK-France border. That is why I am writing to urge you to listen to the evidence from organisations working directly with children in northern France. Project Play, the only organisation specialising in services for children of all ages at the border, has supported nearly 8,000 children since 2018. They have a deep understanding of the risks children face and the solutions that would genuinely keep them safe.

Further criminalisation and securitisation will not protect children. These policies force families onto more dangerous routes and expose them to greater violence. Project Play and others have witnessed this first-hand in Calais and Dunkirk.

Combined with the lack of safe routes to asylum, these policies place children directly in harm's way. Criminalisation sends children to adult prisons and tears families apart. Securitisation leads to overcrowded boats – making crush injuries more likely – and increases the violence children face. Project Play has worked with babies as young as two months old who have been tear-gassed during police operations. Last year, seven-year-old Roula drowned in a canal as her family tried to cross without encountering police.

Without safe alternatives, people will continue to make these journeys. Doubling down on criminalisation and securitisation will only make them more dangerous and deadly. I am especially concerned that, alongside your comments on BBC Radio 4, your government last week closed the Afghan visa scheme – one of the few remaining safe routes. This is yet another step in the wrong direction, with devastating consequences for children and families seeking safety.

The dangers of the current approach are stark. 2024 was the deadliest recorded year at the UK-France border. While crossings increased by 25%, deaths rose by 242%. Fewer children

crossed, yet child fatalities increased by 1500% – more children were killed in 2024 than in the past four years combined. Expanding this approach will only lead to further tragedy.

Project Play recently published a report in response to last year's sharp rise in violence. Foregrounding the voices of the children they work with, it shows that children are facing unprecedented violence, causing profound physical and psychological harm – violence that results directly from UK policies and spending.

As the UK and France prepare to meet this week, I urge you to take this opportunity to prioritise child protection and human rights over criminalisation. We know what will work to keep children safe—and it is not doubling down on the very policies that have caused such profound harm.

I support Project Play's recommendations and urge the UK government to take the following steps:

- Demonstrate accountability for border deaths, including through the publication of transparent data on incidents and fatalities.
- End the funding of all forms of violence against people on the move in northern France.
- Ensure the creation of accessible routes to asylum for all those who need them.

I encourage you to read Project Play's report, [We Want to Be Safe](#), for a detailed account of children's experiences and the actions needed. Please take urgent steps to protect these children and prevent further loss of life.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Optional: Your Address or Postcode]