



## **How to talk about the Illegal Migration Bill and European Convention on Human Rights: Equally Ours messaging guide, March 2023**

The Government's Illegal Migration Bill is inhumane and impractical, and could take us closer to leaving the European Convention on Human Rights.

The accompanying inflammatory rhetoric is a clever and intentionally manipulative use of language to help persuade the public – particularly 2019 Conservative voters – that the Government is tough, that it's 'taking back control' of our borders and 'stopping the small boats'.

We need to be clever and intentional in our response. Values-based framing gives us an effective evidence-based way of responding to this agenda in a way that will build public and political support for humane and practical immigration policy, and for the protection and promotion of our rights, and of social justice more broadly.

The more different organisations and voices in this space talk about these issues in a similar way, the more impact we will have.

This messaging guide is designed to be used in two ways:

- directly with the 'conflicted' public – that 40-50% who tend to hold conflicted and often contradictory views on a range of social issues, and who we can therefore influence if we talk about – frame – those issues in the right way.
- for 'friendly' (Labour, Lib Dem, Green, Conservative, SNP, Plaid Cymru and cross-bench/independent) parliamentarians to use with Conservative parliamentarians who support the Government's plans.

Alongside general evidence-based framing practice, we have drawn on our own and others' research and recommendations – in particular (in the case of immigration), IMIX's recent excellent research and messaging.[1]

We will continue to monitor the proposals, narrative and response, and update this guidance accordingly.

If you have any feedback, queries or requests, please get in touch at [info@equallyours.org.uk](mailto:info@equallyours.org.uk)

### **Some dos and avoids for talking about immigration, human rights and the European Convention on Human Rights**

<b>Do</b>	<b>Avoid</b>
<p>Root messages and frame statistics in values of safety, social justice, freedom, and community and interconnectedness.</p> <p>And invoke the ‘moral argument’ – treating everyone with compassion, dignity and respect because we’re all human beings.</p> <p><i>See examples of values-based statements in the messages below</i></p>	<p>Relying on facts and statistics alone. Our hearts dictate our heads, and unframed statistics are likely to be rejected if they don’t fit with someone’s existing beliefs.</p>
<p>Talk about people and refugees.</p>	<p>(Loaded) de-personalised groups and labels, like migrants.</p> <p>And referring to refugees as ‘them’ as it ‘others’ refugees.</p>
<p>Make the case that it is lawful to seek asylum. That people have the right to seek asylum in the UK.</p>	<p>Saying things like ‘refugees/asylum seekers are <i>not</i> illegal’ as this reinforces the connection in people’s minds</p>

	between refugees/asylum seekers and illegality.
Talk about our long tradition of offering sanctuary to people fleeing persecution.	
When talking about Channel crossings, focus on the <i>people</i> in the boats. Convey the peril of the journey, and focus on what people are seeking: safety.	Focusing on the boats as it dehumanises the issue. You could say, instead, 'refugees crossing the Channel' or 'Channel-crossings'.
<p>Show how the issue can be solved by suggesting clear, concrete and credible solutions/processes that would help (appealing to people's belief in their own pragmatism).</p> <p>And give examples of how it's working well elsewhere or has worked well in the UK in the past (for example, with Ukrainian refugees) to reinforce this credibility.</p>	<p>Crisis talk, as this triggers fear and inflames the rhetoric or switches people off ('it's too big and difficult to solve')</p> <p>And avoid vague and unrealistic solutions.</p>

<p>Be clear about the duty of all countries and governments to help refugees.</p> <p>And how successive governments in the past and now the current Government have repeatedly changed or bent rules to get out of playing their part or doing the right thing by refugees.</p>	<p>Not naming who or what is responsible for the issues and for the solutions.</p>
<p>For Conservative parliamentarians, consider including the following (framed) statistics:</p> <p>73% of people who voted Conservative in the 2019 General Election disapprove of the Government's handling of immigration, thinking it incompetent and chaotic.[2]</p> <p>Only 17%[3] of 2019 Conservative voters agree that the plan to deport refugees to Rwanda will deter refugees from coming to Britain.</p>	

<p>Tell a different, positive, story about safe routes, human rights and the European Convention on Human Rights to the dominant negative and regressive story.</p>	<p>Trying to refute the harmful/incorrect message or myth by repeating it and pointing out that it's wrong, as this just reinforces it in people's minds.</p> <p>This includes repeating harmful metaphors, like 'invasion' in the case of channel crossings.</p> <p>But if you need to (or it's impossible not to) repeat the lie to refute it, use a 'truth sandwich' (start with the truth, briefly indicate the lie, repeat the truth) to give the truth the advantage over the lie(s).</p>
<p>Refer to the Bill as the 'Inhumane Migration Bill'.</p>	<p>Using the official title – 'Illegal Migration Bill' – as it keeps reinforcing the connection between asylum-seekers and criminality.</p>
<p>Position human rights in the context of our everyday lives to make them relevant and relatable to us <i>all</i>.</p>	<p>Position human rights in the context of abstract institutions, using legal terminology.</p> <p>And don't create a hierarchy of rights. Where you need to focus on the rights of a particular person or specific community, connect this to the wider context – showing how it matters to many people/us all.</p>

<p>(Linked to the above) Spell out The European Convention on Human Rights as it (literally!) humanises it; this is about people's lives.</p>	<p>Using the acronym 'ECHR'.</p>
<p>Talk about Britain's role in the creation of the Convention, and our international reputation for protecting and promoting human rights.</p> <p>For messages aimed at Conservative politicians, consider specifically talking about Churchill's pivotal role in the Convention (<i>see example message below</i>), or bring Churchill to mind in more subtle ways (creating a subconscious connection to him).</p> <p>Point out that if we left the Convention, we would join Russia and Belarus – the only two European countries excluded from the Convention because of their records on human rights.</p> <p>And that our withdrawal would breach the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and undermine the peace process.</p>	

## **Messaging**

### **Recommended basic message structure**

Values-based introductory statement > the issue (that runs counter to those values), including any stats, and who or what is responsible for it > concrete and credible solutions to the issue.

### **Example message on immigration/safe routes – long**

We all want to be safe from harm, and we want that for each other, too. Every person has a right to seek asylum and every country has a duty to help refugees.

While the number of refugees has increased due to war and conflict around the world, UK numbers are still lower than they were in the early 2000s, and significantly fewer people seek asylum in the UK compared to Germany, France and Spain.

We're a law-abiding nation that prides itself on our tolerance, freedom and compassion. We have a long tradition of offering safety and sanctuary on our shores to people fleeing conflict and persecution, leaving everything they have and everything they know and love behind, from the Kindertransport to Ukraine.

But successive governments have removed safe ways for most people to seek asylum, leaving them to risk their lives crossing the Channel. According to Home Office figures, the vast majority of people crossing the Channel last year would be granted asylum.

The Government's inhumane migration bill is effectively a ban on refugees. It is a breach of the Refugee Convention, and will cause untold human misery. It's also chaotic, costly and impractical. There are no return deals with France or the EU; there's nowhere to detain the number of refugees; and it's not possible to deport people back to their own country. And it won't work: it won't stop desperate people seeking safety here via perilous routes.

A more compassionate and sensible plan would be to set up safe and secure legal routes to asylum now, reduce the length of time to process asylum applications, set up agreements with European partners to share responsibility, and to allow people to work when they arrive. The government made the system work for Ukrainian people fleeing the war, and they can make it work for other people fleeing conflict and persecution.

That way, people who have lost everything and are seeking a new life would have the chance to contribute to their new community straight away. And the country would gain from the cultural, economic and social benefits refugees bring.

### **Example message on immigration/safe routes – short**

We all want to be safe from harm, and we want that for each other, too. We're a nation that prides itself on our tolerance, freedom and compassion, with a long tradition of offering safety and sanctuary on our shores.

But the Government's inhumane migration bill is effectively a ban on refugees. It's chaotic, costly and impractical, and will cause untold human misery. And it won't stop desperate people risking their lives to seek safety here.

There is a more compassionate and sensible plan. The Government could set up safe legal routes to asylum now, process asylum applications quickly and efficiently, set up agreements with European partners to share responsibility, and allow people to work when they arrive. As they did for Ukrainian people fleeing the war.

### **Example message on immigration/safe routes – v short**

We all want to be safe from harm, and we want that for each other, too. But the Government's inhumane and impractical migration bill will cause untold human misery and it won't stop desperate people risking their lives to seek safety here.

We have a long tradition of offering safety and sanctuary on our shores, and there are more compassionate and practical ways of managing immigration that serve both refugees and our country.

### **Message about human rights and the ECHR - long**

Our human rights are our basic rights and freedoms that we all rely on every day. They're about the British values we're proud of and hold dear and the way we treat one another – things like dignity, fairness, equality, tolerance and respect.

The British invented the European Convention on Human Rights in response to the Holocaust, and Churchill was its founding father. It's a cornerstone of our freedom and democracy.



Walking away from the Convention would be walking away from Churchill's legacy. It would threaten our precious rights and our reputation as a global leader in promoting and protecting those rights. And it would also threaten our safety, as we would lose our criminal law cooperation with the EU.

Withdrawal from the Convention would also breach the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and threaten peace in Northern Ireland. And we would join Russia and Belarus – the only two European countries not to be part of the Convention because of their record on human rights.

### **Message about human rights and the ECHR – short**

Our human rights are our basic rights and freedoms that we all rely on every day. They're about the way we live together and treat one another. Things like fairness, tolerance and respect.

The British invented the European Convention on Human Rights in response to the Holocaust. It's a cornerstone of our freedom and democracy. Walking away from it would be walking away from Churchill's legacy, and our reputation as a global leader in promoting and protecting our rights.

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[1] <https://imix.org.uk/how-to-talk-about-safe-routes-messaging/>

[2] <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2022/12/19/large-majority-britons-disapprove-governments-hand>

[3] Ditto