

4 July 2023

Small boats policy suffers defeats in House of Lords

The government's small boats bill, part of an anti-refugee agenda which PCS has campaigned against since 2022, has this week suffered eleven defeats in the House of Lords.

On Monday, peers secured several key changes to the bill. Most significantly, they voted to back various amendments limiting the detention of children and pregnant women, to insert protections for LGBT+ asylum seekers, to force asylum claims to be considered for anyone not deported within six months, and to back the courts' role in deciding what amounts to a reasonable period of immigration detention.

The vote followed four defeats last week by peers, including on modern slavery safeguards, a bar on backdating deportations and asylum help for unaccompanied children.

In the same week, the Court of Appeal ruled that the UK government's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda is unlawful – a decision [welcomed by PCS](#) as a “vindication of our position” of not allowing members to be subjected to hostile working conditions and fighting to ensure refugees are not subjected to inhumane policies.

These defeats come as crossings by people seeking asylum have set a new record. In the first six months of 2023, 11,434 people were found to have made the journey from France.

Safe passage

In 2022, PCS united with Care4Calais and Channel Rescue to force the government to withdraw plans to order Border Force staff to turn back boats in the channel. This current bill, which has now been amended by peers in the House of Lords beyond recognition, was the government's reaction to this defeat.

PCS believes that the only way to protect human life and prevent people from drowning in the English Channel is to give them safe passage. In a [pamphlet](#) released last year, Care4Calais and PCS proposed alternative policy solutions to the current dangerous and uncontrolled situation in the Channel.

PCS Head of Bargaining, Paul O'Connor, who has been leading this [campaign work](#) for the union, said last week:

“It is time for the government to adopt the Safe Passage policy put forward by PCS and Care4Calais. That is the solution to the Channel crossings. It is the only way to prevent tragic deaths in the Channel. It would allow refugees to have their asylum claims properly and safely considered; and would allow our members to do their jobs without consistently ridiculous political interference.”

[Reps and members can read more details about PCS campaigning on this issue on PCS Knowledge \(login required\).](#)