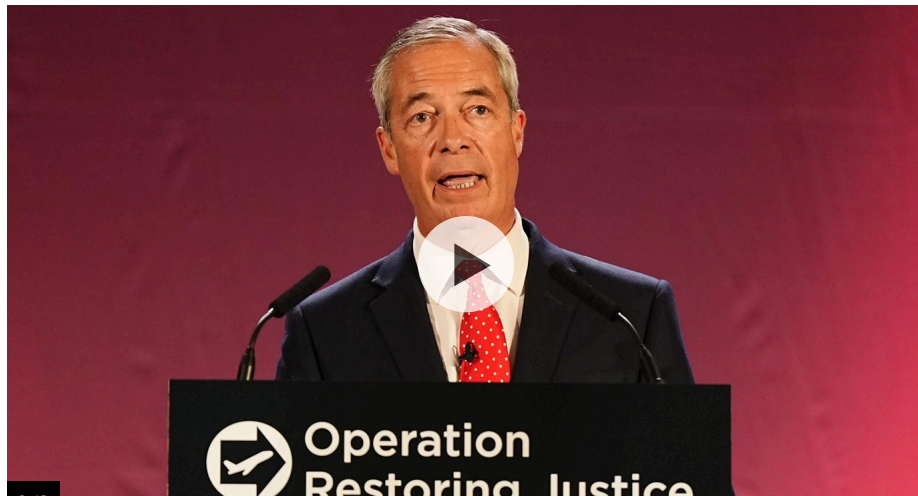


Reform prepared to deport 600,000 under migration plans

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Reform UK has suggested it would be prepared to deport 600,000 migrants over five years if it won power at the next election.

Leader Nigel Farage said his party would bar anyone who comes to the UK on small boats from claiming asylum, under plans announced earlier.

It says it would make £2bn available to offer payments or aid to countries like Afghanistan to take back migrants, with sanctions potentially imposed on uncooperative countries.

Labour has branded the proposals unworkable, whilst the Conservatives have accused Reform of copying ideas they announced earlier this year.

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Launching the plan, dubbed Operation Restoring Justice, Farage said the "only way" to stop small boats crossing the English Channel was by "detaining and deporting absolutely anyone who comes via that route".

"If we do that, the boats will stop coming in days because there will be no incentive," he added.

Farage, who had previously said mass deportations were a "political impossibility", said his party had now come up with "a credible plan, so that we can deport hundreds of thousands of people over the five years of a Reform government".

During the news conference, Farage asked Reform UK chair Zia Yusuf whether it was realistic to deport 500,000-600,000 people within the lifetime of the first Parliament under a Reform UK government, to which he replied "totally, yeah".

Reform, which currently has just four MPs although it is leading in many opinion polls, has not specified what proportion of this number would come from future arrivals, or people already in the country.

Yusuf claimed "north of 650,000 adults" were already living in the UK illegally, and could be deported "promptly and efficiently".

However, he also accepted his estimate was an attempt to "count the uncountable", and Farage added there would need to be an "exercise of common sense" in how the policy is applied.

Citing Australian policies, Farage said they showed mass deportation programmes could be effective in stopping people coming to Britain illegally "in the future".

Reform UK's policy would amount to a huge increase in the number of deportations and goes further than any previous plans outlined by other political parties.

There were 10,652 asylum-related returns in the year to June, according to Home Office data.

Under the plan, people would be arrested on arrival, detained at disused RAF bases and, if agreements were reached, returned to their countries of origin, including Afghanistan and Eritrea, where a significant number of people on small boats come from.

The party says it would build removal centres in remote areas of the country under plans to detain up to 24,000 people within 18 months.

The party would also look to countries such as Rwanda and Albania to house migrants, and seek to use British overseas territories such as Ascension Island as a "fallback" if people awaiting deportation could not be sent elsewhere.

Reform UK said it would aim to scale up deportation charter flights to five per day.

A Reform UK government would give migrants the option to return voluntarily and offer them £2,500 for doing so as part of a "carrot and stick approach", the party says.

Reform said the plans would cost about £10bn over five years, but would save the government money it spends on asylum hotels and other costs over the long term.

Key to the plan is the passage of a new law called the Illegal Migration (Mass Deportation) Bill.

Reform UK said the bill would create a legal duty for the home secretary to remove illegal migrants, and ban anyone who had been deported from re-entering the UK for life.

The bill would also "disapply" international treaties like the Refugee Convention, a 1951 treaty that prevents signatory countries like the UK from returning refugees to countries where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.

To make removals easier, Reform is promising to leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), another treaty designed to protect human rights and political freedoms.

The treaty is a central part of UK human rights law and has been used to halt attempts to deport migrants who are deemed to be in the UK illegally.

The party said it would replace the Human Rights Act with a British Bill of Rights, which would apply only to UK citizens and those who have a legal right to live in the UK.

The proposals could face legal challenges and political opposition, with Labour branding it unworkable and the Conservatives accusing Reform UK of recycling their ideas.

Labour Party chairwoman Ellie Reeves criticised the lack of detail in the six-page plan, which Yusuf said four months ago would be a "comprehensive strategy" with "a full policy document" including "a year-by-year timeline" and "clear targets".

"Today, we got none of those things, nor a single answer to any of the practical, financial or ethical questions about how their plan would work," she said.

"Nigel Farage can't say where his detention centres will be, can't say what will happen to women and children, and can't say how he'll convince hostile regimes like Iran to take people back."

The Conservatives said Reform was "reheating" plans it had already announced and pursued.

Shadow home secretary Chris Philp MP said the Tories had already tabled a deportation bill, which detailed "how we would disapply the Human Rights Act from all immigration matters, and deport every illegal immigrant on arrival".

"Months later, Reform have not done the important work necessary to get a grip on the immigration crisis and instead have produced a copy and paste of our proposals," Philip said.

Liberal Democrat deputy leader Daisy Cooper said Reform UK's plan "crumbles under the most basic scrutiny".

"The idea that Reform UK is going to magic up some new places to detain people and deport them to, but don't have a clue where those places would be, is taking the public for fools," Cooper said.

Deal with France

The arrival of migrants on small boats has contributed to an increase in asylum claims in recent years and put pressure on the UK government to stop the crossings.

A record 28,288 people have crossed the English Channel in small boats this year so far, 46% more than by the same date in 2024. A record 111,000 asylum applications were made in the year to June.

UK government figures show there have been 188,969 detected irregular arrivals since 2020.

These people mostly arrived on small boats, but a small number also came by land, air and sea; and the most common nationalities were Afghan, Syrian, Eritrean, Iranian, and Sudanese.

Since being elected in July last year, Labour has vowed to tackle small boat crossings by "smashing" the people-smuggling gangs that facilitate crossings.

The government is also preparing to send back the first migrants under a "one in, one out" pilot scheme with France announced last month.

Ministers have not set out how many people could be sent to France under the deal, under which the UK would accept an equal number of asylum seekers who have not tried to cross and can pass security and eligibility checks.

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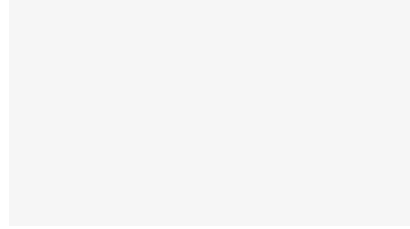
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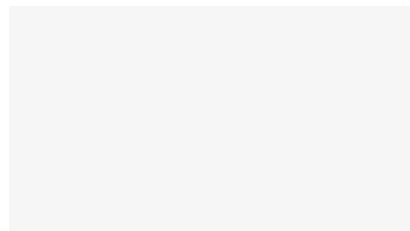


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