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# Primer: The case for a new Minister for Migration

NEW  
DIPLOMACY  
PROJECT

## TOP LINE:

An incoming Labour Government should appoint a Minister for Migration with joint departmental responsibilities in the Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office to tackle the current migration crisis, deal with small boats, and responsibly manage migration ODA spending.

## BACKGROUND

Over the last [two years](#), the UK has faced an unprecedented number of people crossing the English channel in small boats which has been exacerbated by the lack of safe immigration routes provided by the Government. The rising number of channel crossings chimes with the rest of Europe which has also [seen](#) a rise in the number of irregular border crossings as there is a growing demand as communities and individuals are displaced as a result of climate change, war, and poverty.

The Government has committed to plans that will criminalise irregular crossings and to repatriate and deport failed asylum seekers to Rwanda and other third countries, but have failed to offer new safe and legal routes. Beyond the current limited and in some cases non-functional schemes covering refugee resettlement, refugee family reunion, and bespoke schemes for Hong Kongers who hold British National Overseas (BNO) passports, Ukrainians, and some Afghans.

At the same time the UK has a growing backlog of asylum cases, which at the end of 2022 stood at over [166,000 cases](#). As the backlog of cases grows, the Home Office has been spending an increasing amount of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds on hotels and accommodation to house individuals who are waiting for a determination on their asylum cases.

In 2021, the Government [spent](#) over £1 billion of ODA funds (almost 10% of the total ODA budget) on supporting refugees in the UK. Almost half of this figure was spent on "initial accommodation". The Center for Global Development [estimated](#) that the amount of aid spent on in-country refugee costs in 2022 could exceed £3 billion, an increase of more than 300% since 2020.

The International Development Committee in its inquiry into UK aid spending, has [warned](#) that the Home Office's transparency on ODA spending "woefully inadequate and wilfully opaque". It has also noted in a recent [report](#) that the Home Office's ability to draw on ODA budget appears currently without restrictions, and that the current arrangement and lack of transparency does not encourage the Home Office to spend the money effectively.

Mass migration and a growing demand by many in the global south to migrate will likely continue throughout the rest of the decade, according to the UN Human Rights Committee in 2022 over [100 million people](#) were displaced as a result of conflict, climate change, and poverty. According to the UN Refugee Agency [69% of refugees are hosted in neighbouring countries](#), with the largest number in developing countries.

Youth unemployment remains a pressing issue and a factor behind migration particularly in North Africa and the Middle East, where the United Nations estimates that the region will need to [create](#) 33 million new jobs by 2030 if the region is to be stabilised. It is worth noting that the developing world plays host to most refugees, with

Migration and the provision of visas and safe legal routes has become a more commonly used foreign policy tool by the current Government, which cited in the recent refresh of the [Integrated Review](#) that the provision of BNO visas to Hong Kongers, and visas to Ukrainians and Afghans were part of its foreign policy response.

According to the Home Office immigration [statistics](#), between 31 January 2021 – 30 September 2022 144,576 BNO visas were granted to Hong Kongers, 186,893 visas for Ukrainians have been issued since March 2022, and since 24 November 2022 12,300 visas have been issued to Afghans.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

An incoming Labour Government should commit to the creation of a cross-departmental Minister for Migration to manage the UK's immigration policy, its approach to responding to the migration crisis, and with responsibility for migration ODA spending.

The Minister for Migration would sit across both the Home Office and the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and be responsible for ODA spending on migration and in-country refugee costs.

Labour could also consider whether there is value in giving the Minister of Migration a third role in the Department of Levelling Up which would allow them to have direct involvement in integration efforts or within the Department for Business and Trade which would offer them the opportunity to marry up migration with labour shortages in the economy.

## RATIONALE

It would signal that Labour recognises that a proper resolution to the current migration challenges the UK faces, requires domestic action to address the asylum backlog and deter crossings, but also diplomacy with our partners in Europe and third countries to establish safe and legal routes and a potential successor to the Dublin Protocols.

From a practical perspective, the establishment of safe and legal routes in third countries would require careful coordination with the UK's diplomatic embassies and consulates if they are to be successfully negotiated and implemented.

It would remove the siloed and deliberate approach the Conservatives have undertaken to respond to the boats crossing, ensuring that the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office and the Home Office are working hand in glove to not only respond to boat crossings but to come up with a clear strategy to use ODA spending to respond to the growing migration of people.

The creation of a Minister for Migration would address the current lack of transparency and policy incoherence with the wider ODA budget that the rising amount of Home Office aid spending on in-country refugee costs presents. Ensuring that the Home Office's ODA spending is integrated into the UK Government's wider development aid spending policy.

The Minister for Migration could also be tasked by the next Labour Government with auditing the Home Office's ODA spending, identifying waste, and ensuring that it is spent both transparently and effectively. This could feed into the wider review of ODA spending rules that Labour has committed to undertaking in government.

It would demonstrate to the electorate that the spending of ODA is a political choice and it is possible to look after refugees in the UK while also spending development aid overseas to address the factors driving migration.

Given that the boat crossings rank as the [second](#) highest election priority issue for 2019 Conservative voters, Labour may consider allowing the Minister of Migration to attend Cabinet. This would not only signal the importance with which Labour takes the issue, but it will increase the representation of development ministers within the Cabinet.

## PRECEDENT

In the [past](#) the Conservatives have had joint-departmental ministers in the Foreign Office and the International Development Office with the rationale at the time given that it would help improve oversight of ODA budget spending.

There is [precedent](#) for a joint-departmental Home Office and development Minister, in 2015 Theresa May's Government created a joint-ministerial post across the Home Office, the International Department for Development, and the Department for Communities and Local Government to coordinate the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

Currently the Cabinet manual states that the Prime Minister can appoint 21 paid ministers to attend Cabinet. However, the Prime Minister can [appoint](#) a number of unpaid ministers who are able to attend Cabinet. Under Boris Johnson at least 10 further ministers were not full secretaries of state attended Cabinet.

The current Minister for Immigration, Robert Jenrick MP, attends [Cabinet](#). As does the current Minister for International Development, Andrew Mitchell MP.

The Swedish Government has a [Minister for Migration](#), which is responsible for refugee and immigration policy, return policy, support for repatriation, the link between migration and development, and global cooperation on these issues. This could serve as a model for the UK's Minister for Migration.

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