

Social Work Scotland Illegal Migration Bill Statement

Scotland Social Work Scotland is the social work leadership organisation in Scotland, supporting managers, leaders and practice across the country. Our human rights and person focused values are those of the social work profession. The Illegal Migration Bill is fundamentally in conflict with those values, and we are appalled that a country which has taken pride in upholding the rights of all people should be promoting an approach which is in direct contradiction to those rights, and the basic dignity and humanity of individuals.

The bill, if enacted, will remove the right to claim asylum from those arriving 'illegally', stripping away their basic human right to safety from abuse and violence. This also applies to unaccompanied children, who, though cared for until they reach the age of 18, could then face potential deportation.

Every individual, **and** particularly a child, has the right to a safe nurturing environment. Our Scottish legislation enshrines this in our Getting it Right for Every Child framework, soon to expand to encompass adults. The Illegal Migration Bill denies people fleeing violence, conflict and discrimination this safety. Putting ourselves in the shoes of someone seeking safety on our shores from human rights abuse causes us to question what desperation would lead them to make such a journey. We believe that should result in a compassionate response, rather than making desperation a criminal offence.

Regardless of background, continent of birth, or other national characteristics, everyone deserves the same response. Our professional and legislative contexts do not discriminate in terms of nationality, need or circumstances. Social Work Scotland firmly stands on the foundation that any person arriving in the UK seeking asylum, regardless of the route they take to get here, must be welcomed and given a fair hearing in UK. Social workers work with asylum seekers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children on a daily basis, and hear the stories of their journey and the trauma they have experienced. Of those granted protection in 2021, 89% were given refugee status or humanitarian protection (UK government statistics). To progress with the Illegal Migration Bill denies the voice and lived experience of each of those people, contradicts our basic legislative framework, contravenes the UNCRC and risks creating a hostile environment for those who most need our care and protection.

We recognise the demands presented by dealing with a high number of asylum seekers, not least where these are children who need care, but condemn the UK Government's approach as against social work and human rights values and commitments. A focus on progressing the right to appropriate assessment would be more appropriate, rather than diminishing individuals' rights through production of additional legislation that will have limited impact in resolving a complex problem.

Social Work Scotland will continue to represent our members opposition to this Bill, and are heartened to see others doing the same. We maintain hope that compassion and decency will prevail, and that we continue as a nation to treat people coming to the UK as we would expect to be treated were we fleeing for safety and needing others to support us.