



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Asylum and migration, HC 197](#)

Wednesday 11 May 2022

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Home Affairs Committee Members present: Dame Diana Johnson (Chair); Ms Diane Abbott; Lee Anderson; Simon Fell; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Gary Sambrook.

Joint Committee on Human Rights Member present: Joanna Cherry.

Questions 1-123

Witnesses

I: Tom Pursglove MP, Minister for Justice and Tackling Illegal Immigration, Home Office; and Dan Hobbs, Director, Asylum, Protection and Enforcement, Home Office.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Pursglove MP and Dan Hobbs.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to Home Office Minister Tom Pursglove MP and Dan Hobbs, Director of Asylum, Protection and Enforcement at the Home Office. We are grateful to you both for attending this morning.

Today we want to look specifically at the announcement last month of the UK-Rwanda partnership agreement concerning asylum seekers. We will move on to specific questions about the policy, but I want to start with the actual announcement and the way it was made. The announcement was made on 14 April, which was just at the start of the *purdah* period for the local elections on 5 May. Minister, could you enlighten us about the exchange of letters between the permanent secretary and the Home Secretary that took place on 13 April, the day before, and concerned the ministerial direction that the permanent secretary sought from the Home Secretary? It all seems very late in the day if the announcement was to be made on 14 April. Could you explain why there was a rush to get the policy out—in particular with no detail?

Tom Pursglove: Thank you, Madam Chairman, for the invitation to appear before the Committee this morning. Can I congratulate you on your appointment to the Chair? It is a privilege to be here and give evidence on this important issue.

Let me just set this in some perspective. As a Government, we have been consistently clear that we cannot continue to have people putting their lives in the hands of evil criminal gangs and paying money to those evil criminal gangs to facilitate these crossings. We have said that we will strain every sinew to put a stop to that evil criminality.

I would argue that it was right that we signed this new partnership at the first opportunity we had to do so. Every day that passes without it is a day when lives can potentially be lost in the channel. We wanted to waste no opportunity to crack on and get on with delivering this partnership. The partnership is complex, of course, and there has been intensive negotiation and discussion around it over the course of the last few months. Those negotiations concluded, at which point we were in a position to get on and sign it. That is precisely why we acted in the way that we did, wasting no opportunity to do that.

Q2 **Chair:** But there was no detail available, was there? It was the BBC, the *Telegraph* and *The Times* that all got briefed on what they thought the policy was. None of that detail was available to Parliament for MPs to look at. I notice that it was only on Monday this week that the Home Office produced documents setting out the detail of the policy. You will understand that there was a lot of concern. A lot of the charities that work with asylum seekers and refugees in this country have raised the problem that by making that announcement on 14 April with no proper detail, you caused a lot of distress and upset. In today's media round, for example, there was reference to a Rwandan asylum seeker in this



HOUSE OF COMMONS

country who heard that announcement and thought that would mean he would be sent back to Rwanda. What I do not understand is why you made that announcement on 14 April with no detail about how this policy would work. Why has it taken you three weeks to produce the detail?

Tom Pursglove: You will know, of course, that the announcement was made as part of a wider package of measures that the Prime Minister set out in Kent. Of course, the Home Secretary was in Rwanda at the same time and was able to announce this policy.

Q3 **Chair:** But where was the detail? That is the issue.

Tom Pursglove: We have taken great care to make sure that the detail underpinning this policy has been made available as far as we are able—

Chair: But three weeks later.

Tom Pursglove: —taking into account, of course, that we do not want—I think you will recognise why this is important—to do anything that aids these evil criminal gangs to exploit vulnerable people. It is right that we tread carefully in delivering the detail of the policy in a way that is sensitive to that and that doesn't support that sort of criminality, which is so egregious and unacceptable.

Q4 **Chair:** I understand what you are saying, but the three weeks has caused problems—concern—for asylum seekers in this country, and it just seems to us that Parliament should have had that detail when the announcement was made.

The other point I want to raise with you is about Wendy Williams and her review of how the Home Office operates. One of the things she was very clear about was the Home Office failure, in the past, to always look at the "face behind the case". This is, again, illustrative of that failure to understand that this is about individuals—about people. By making these announcements giving no detail, you set lots of hares running, but it has taken you three weeks to actually come up with the details.

Tom Pursglove: What I would say is that of course the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament at the first available opportunity, a few days after the announcement was made.

Q5 **Chair:** Wasn't it an urgent question?

Tom Pursglove: Well, I think it is fair to say as well that I am probably one of the Ministers—I was certainly in the top five in terms of appearing at the Dispatch Box to be questioned, prior to Prorogation, on a whole range of matters. There are members of this Committee who asked me questions during the passage of the Nationality and Borders Act about—

Chair: As it should be, Minister.

Tom Pursglove: Quite right, too, and I appreciate that opportunity, which is why I was delighted to accept your invitation to appear here. I think parliamentary scrutiny is important, which is why the House had the detail set out for it—



Chair: But they didn't.

Tom Pursglove: The opportunity to ask questions was made available. And I would argue, actually, that this point around the uncertainty is absolutely outweighed by the fact that at the moment we have people making these dangerous crossings that put lives at risk, as we saw in November.

Chair: You have said that, Minister; we understand.

Tom Pursglove: But it is materially important and we shouldn't waste an opportunity to shut that criminality down.

Q6 **Chair:** We understand that. The problem I have with this is the process, and providing information in a timely way when announcements are made. That is my issue.

Could we move on? I want to be very clear about the evidence base that you have used to make the policy announcement. I know that the idea is that you want to deter people smugglers from coming across, particularly across the channel in small boats, but could you explain to the Committee what the evidence base is that the policy you have put forward will work?

Tom Pursglove: Of course, what we have been doing through the new plan for immigration is introducing wide-ranging reforms to fix the broken asylum system, of which this is an addition. I would argue that it is a welcome addition that will help us to deter these dangerous journeys on the English channel in particular, by severing the link between individuals paying evil criminal gangs, making those crossings—of course, the individuals responsible for facilitating these crossings have no regard to whether those individuals arrive here safely or not—and then thinking that those individuals will remain in the United Kingdom for an extensive length of time.

There is no one single intervention that will resolve the issues that we are grappling with. I have been consistently clear about this. It is of course a new policy. This economic and migration partnership that we have agreed with Rwanda is a world first. I doubt that it will be the last of those sorts of agreements that are reached involving countries around the world. I genuinely do believe that there will be a deterrent effect. It is difficult to quantify that at this stage. You read conflicting media reports of individuals being interviewed, for example by the media in Calais. Some say they are not going to make the journeys; some say that they are still going to make those journeys. It is important to set this in the context, too, that there are individuals, for example, who have not yet made crossings and who have already paid criminal gangs, so that investment has already been made. But I do believe that, in the fullness of time, this will make a difference.

Q7 **Chair:** Okay, but I am still not really clear. What modelling have you done to give you the evidence base for this decision?

Tom Pursglove: This is a new and untested policy at this point in time.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: But you must have modelled this.

Tom Pursglove: One thing I would say is that it is worth going back through the *Hansard* of the Nationality and Borders Bill Committee, where George Brandis set out the difference that he believed the approach that they took made in terms of dealing with this in Australia.

Q8 **Chair:** We are going to come on to Australia—we have some specific questions—but what I am interested in is the modelling that you have done in terms of the effectiveness of this policy. What modelling have you done?

Tom Pursglove: In some ways, you yourself alluded, in your opening questions, to the fact that this has added a level of uncertainty to migrants choosing to make these journeys. The uncertainty that you spoke about in a way speaks to the uncertainty that this has now introduced. What this is doing is ending people making those journeys and thinking that there is a very significant chance of them remaining in the United Kingdom for a significant length of time. Doing nothing is not an option. Inaction is not acceptable.

Q9 **Chair:** No one is suggesting it is, Minister. I am just trying to understand the basis of the decision that the Government have made—the modelling. If you have not done any modelling, please just tell us.

Tom Pursglove: It is whole-system change. What you have seen is conflicting accounts from different people as to whether they believe, in their particular circumstances, this will make a difference. I do think that, in the fullness of time, we will see this policy, as part of the wider package that we are introducing, really shift the dynamic. What is absolutely clear is that we couldn't continue with the status quo.

Q10 **Chair:** Okay. Mr Hobbs, are you able to help? Is there some modelling to underpin this policy?

Dan Hobbs: As I think the Minister said, we did look at where other countries have done this. Australia did it as part of the wider package of their sovereign borders programme. They have had no illegal maritime crossings since 2014, so there is evidence out there that this, as part of a wider package, which is set out as part of the new plan, is part of that. Obviously, understanding human behaviour and drivers is extremely complex. Understanding individual interventions is very complex and difficult, but you can model the difference—if it has a 10% impact or a 40% impact—in terms of flow.

Q11 **Chair:** So you are saying there is some modelling that we can see.

Dan Hobbs: Well, no, you can do some assumption modelling, as part of evidence, to assess numbers, but defining the individual impact and the individual decisions of migrants is extremely complicated. I think that is what the accounting officer—

Q12 **Chair:** I am confused about whether you saying there is modelling or not.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: It is only logical to assert that if you cut off the business model of these evil criminal gangs, that will materially make a difference in terms of people making these crossings.

- Q13 **Chair:** Right, well it seems that there is not any modelling that you can share with us. This is all just looking at what happens in Australia and making some assumptions and thinking, "That might happen here." That is what you seem to be saying.

Tom Pursglove: I would be delighted to hear an alternative. One of the things that I am always frustrated by is the criticism that we see and the lack of alternatives being put forward.

- Q14 **Chair:** All I am trying to find out is the basis of the decision that you have made in the Home Office—what modelling you have done.

I want to move on to one other question and then I will bring Simon Fell in. The Home Office has stated that the cost per person relocated to Rwanda will be approximately the same as the cost of processing a person in the UK. Could you tell us what that figure is, please, and could you also tell me what the evidence base is for that figure?

Tom Pursglove: The approximate figure for processing a case within our asylum system is around £12,000 per individual.

- Q15 **Chair:** And that is the figure that you are saying it will cost to process someone in Rwanda.

Tom Pursglove: What we have said is that we will make contributions to the Rwandan Government similar to those that we are spending on processing claims here in the United Kingdom. That is important, because we think that it is right that this is done properly—that there is that proper wraparound support provided. You will recognise that this is an economic development and migration partnership. We think it is right that we support jobs, skills and proper integration.

In terms of actual processing costs, we will be making contributions akin to those that we are currently spending in the United Kingdom. You will recognise, Madam Chairman, that we are spending nearly £5 million a day in the asylum system, at the moment, on hotel accommodation. That is not sustainable. If we stand back and do nothing, those costs will continue to grow.

- Q16 **Chair:** So there is a £12,000 per individual processing cost. You are giving £120 million up front to the Rwandan Government—without anybody arriving, they get £120 million—then £12,000 per person processed, and then I also saw, in the briefing material from the Home Office, that there is an additional cost because you will support people for five years if their asylum claim is successful. So there will be an additional cost that you will be paying on top of the £12,000. Is that right?

Tom Pursglove: As I say, we will be paying sums of money that are similar to what it would cost us to deal with those cases within our asylum



HOUSE OF COMMONS

system. Of course, because this will have the deterrent effect that we believe it will have, that should help us to get costs under control in the longer term, because the deterrent effect should mean that fewer people then make those journeys. That will, of course, then bring the overall costs down within the system.

Q17 **Chair:** Do you have some modelling around the figures? If you are saying that you think that the number of people will decline because of the deterrent effect, are you saying that you have some figures about what the cost will be?

Tom Pursglove: I would refer the Committee back to my earlier answers on this, but what is absolutely apparent to me is that if we do not intervene and we just continue as we are with the status quo, those costs will just continue to grow—we will be spending more than £5 million a day on asylum accommodation. What I cannot do is get into the detailed costings, because there is a respect that needs to be shown to the partnership that we have with the Rwandan Government, and that funding arrangement is treated as confidential.

Chair: Sorry, but this public money.

Tom Pursglove: But of course, the Committee and parliamentarians and people across the country will have the opportunity to look at Home Office accounts in due course, where detail will be set out in the usual way.

Chair: Okay. I am going to move on to Simon Fell.

Q18 **Simon Fell:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister and Mr Hobbs, for joining us. Can I go back to the Chair's first suite of questions? Mr Hobbs, looking at the Australian model, you mentioned the suite of tools that they use there, one of which is push-back, which we are now not using. I am interested to know whether you think, as we are not engaging that policy but just relocating individuals, that this is going to be as effective as the Australian model in preventing these criminal gangs from moving people across to the UK.

Tom Pursglove: Is that directed to me or to Mr Hobbs?

Simon Fell: Whoever would like to take it.

Tom Pursglove: We believe that what is significant about this partnership is that individuals who are relocated to Rwanda will have their asylum claims, if they wish to enter the asylum system there, heard within the Rwandan system. Of course, if they are granted asylum, they will remain in Rwanda. That is the way that this policy is configured.

As I said earlier, George Brandis set out quite a powerful and compelling case during the Nationality and Borders Bill Committee evidence sessions about why he believed this would work, but it is not about one single intervention. This is about the whole-system reform that we are introducing—making sure that we process claims more quickly, that we provide certainty either way for people, that we remove people who have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

no right to be here without any needless delay, and, of course, changing the dynamic overall. We have talked about hotel costs, for example, which are clearly unsustainable and unacceptable. This is whole-system change that we are introducing. The Rwanda policy is an important part of that. Of itself, it is not the only solution to this, but I think it will fundamentally shift the dynamic.

Q19 Simon Fell: In terms of modelling how that dynamic will shift this year, do you have an expectation of the numbers you expect to be moving to Rwanda in 2022?

Tom Pursglove: This is an uncapped scheme, and the Prime Minister has said that we expect thousands of people to be relocated to Rwanda as part of it. It is very difficult to quantify specifically the effect that it will have, because there are so many dynamics that play into this. Of course, the flow of migrants making crossings is materially relevant, and that will play into the deterrent effect that this has.

What I am not in a position to do is to comment specifically on numbers that we would expect to be relocated this year. If the policy has the effect that I hope it will have, we will begin to see a real drop-off in the numbers of people making dangerous journeys to the UK in the first place. That of itself will demonstrate the success of the policy. What I can say is that we are determined to get on and deliver this—the Prime Minister has been clear about that; the Home Secretary has been clear about that—because we think this is an important intervention that will make a difference.

Q20 Simon Fell: When this was trailed in the media, we were shown pictures of the accommodation that some of these individuals may be housed in. There will be limited facilities on the ground already. How much capacity is there on the ground at the moment?

Tom Pursglove: I reiterate that this is an economic development and migration partnership. One of the reasons the partnership is configured in the way it is is that we want to provide proper support, working with the Rwandan Government, to make sure that this is a success. We think it is important that that is done fairly and that proper costs support is provided.

Members will have seen in the media reports some of the accommodation that has been made available in Kigali to support this. Of course, the flow of migrants and the numbers of people being relocated is materially relevant in terms of the infrastructure that is required, but through the contributions that we are making, I would argue that we will be able to support the Rwandan Government to put proper provision in place and that, as the numbers of people who are being relocated evolve, the infrastructure will be able to keep pace with that to make sure that the accommodation is there and the proper wraparound support is available too.

Q21 Simon Fell: Just to press you on initial capacity in Rwanda, where are we sitting at the moment?



Tom Pursglove: There is, as you have seen, accommodation that has been made available for these purposes. The Rwandan Government is of course keeping under careful review the appropriateness of its stock of accommodation to meet the needs that exist as we process cases. This is a partnership. There is dialogue that takes place nearly every day of the week with the Rwandan Government around this, and that dialogue is important because it helps to shape the decisions that are made. I would add that they have hotel accommodation available as well, for example, which may well be an option in the shorter term while further, more permanent accommodation is brought on stream, but there is that permanent accommodation in the way that you have seen demonstrated in the media reporting on this.

Q22 **Simon Fell:** Moving on, the Home Secretary has stated that everyone who is going to be considered for relocation will be screened, interviewed and have access to legal advice. What is your estimate for how long it will take to go through that process and to move an individual from the UK to Rwanda?

Tom Pursglove: We are talking weeks. This is a process that should be concluded very quickly—of course, with experienced case workers taking the lead, making judgments on cases on a case-by-case basis. I suspect I will be making this point about looking at cases individually in several responses to questions that will no doubt be asked. That is work that will go on; it will be done intensively. This will be properly resourced. There is the experience among the case working team to do this. Of course, we do not want people to have unnecessary and elongated uncertainty around their cases, so we will get on and process those as quickly as possible.

Q23 **Simon Fell:** When the Committee looked at channel crossing, we took evidence about individuals and their habits or what they are told to do by many of the criminal gangs: to destroy the documentation they are carrying, and to hide any evidence of which country they come from and, often, their age. Where individuals are arriving in the UK and do not have documentation, how will that play out in this process?

Tom Pursglove: Obviously, we will get to the bottom of those particular issues in individual cases. It is worth making the point that the individuals who are making these dangerous and unnecessary journeys will be treated as inadmissible to our asylum system in the way we have set out previously. Again, we will take appropriate decisions on a case-by-case basis. People will have the opportunity to make representations in their own way, recognising the particulars of their individual circumstance.

The ultimate judgment about whether individuals will be transferred to Rwanda will be whether it is safe for them to be transferred. We will work through those issues appropriately, because that is right and proper. We think it is crucial that people have the opportunity to make representations about their specific cases and lodge any reasons why it would be inappropriate for them.

Q24 **Simon Fell:** I suppose I am challenged by the point that if we do not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have individuals' date of birth, nationality or any documentation, how will that process run in a matter of weeks?

Dan Hobbs: Obviously, third country removals are not completely new to the Home Office. We have done them under the Dublin system. It is not uncommon that, as you say, some migrants destroy their documentation or there is an issue of age dispute. Any age dispute would need to be fully concluded before someone is served with a notice of intention to transfer to Rwanda.

What we are starting this week is serving the notice of intention, and individuals in detention have seven days to bring any representations, during which time they will have access to legal aid. If they are not in detention, there is a 14-day period where they can work with their advisers and legal representatives to bring anything forward. The only preclusion on nationality to transfer is if you are Rwandan: if someone is Rwandan, they do not fall within this policy. Any other nationality does. There are standard procedures for establishing age, and we collect biometric and biographic details on the individuals who present to us. That is standard as part of the immigration system.

Q25 **Simon Fell:** My final question is this. There is a quid pro quo, which is that we have agreed to take some of Rwanda's most vulnerable refugees. What criteria will be used to select them? Do you have an idea on numbers for those?

Tom Pursglove: We will say more about that in due course, as you would expect. What I can say is that we are talking tens here. It will be individuals who have particularly complex needs that we are perhaps better able to meet in the United Kingdom—for example, where there are particularly acute health vulnerabilities.

Q26 **Chair:** You said that Rwandans were excluded from this scheme.

Tom Pursglove: Yes.

Chair: So Ukrainians who travel across on a small boat and do not meet the visa requirements would be put into that category of admissibility. Is that correct?

Tom Pursglove: I think a very clear message should go out from this Committee and the House—I have said this repeatedly in the Chamber—that there is absolutely no reason why any Ukrainian should be getting in a small boat and paying a people smuggler to get the United Kingdom.

Q27 **Chair:** But what if they did? I just want to be clear that they would be included.

Tom Pursglove: We have two uncapped schemes that are generous and that capture people's circumstances. I think we need to send out a really clear message that of course people should be using those safe and legal routes that are available.

Chair: Yes, of course they should.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: Nearly 95,000 visas have been issued now. Again, I just go back to the point that of course we look at cases on a case-by-case basis, but I think what is crucial is to really get across that message that people should be using the safe and legal routes if they are coming from Ukraine. It would be absurd to do otherwise.

- Q28 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Morning, Minister; morning, Mr Hobbs. Obviously, we have debated this issue for several months and there is no need to go over old ground—you know what I think about this policy—so I will just ask some factual questions and some supplementaries first of all. We have just mentioned Ukrainian nationals. Can I ask about Ukrainians who, for example, have crossed into Northern Ireland from Dublin and so they are not using dinghies or anything like that? Are they within the purview of this policy or are they not?

Tom Pursglove: Perhaps Mr Hobbs could say something about that, in terms of how those have been handled to date.

Dan Hobbs: I think we have published an approach on people who come via the CTA and who arrived lawfully in the Republic of Ireland, in terms of the leave that will be afforded to them. Depending on the individual circumstances, they may not fall within the inadmissibility criteria. That's the first element—if someone falls under the inadmissibility criteria for the UK. As I say, I think we have published details of our approach to Ukrainian nationals who have arrived lawfully in the Republic of Ireland and come to the CTA.

- Q29 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Okay, but you said “may”, so there is a possibility—

Dan Hobbs: Again, it's down to the individual case, but in principle, the policy that has been published in respect of those crossing the CTA, who arrived lawfully in the Republic of Ireland and who are of Ukrainian nationality would apply.

- Q30 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Could you write to us with a little bit more detail about that? You are leaving open the possibility that Ukrainians who have crossed from Dublin to Belfast could conceivably end up in Rwanda, and I would obviously like to understand properly how that could happen.

Tom Pursglove: Of course, we are very happy to look at that request in terms of writing to the Committee, but I just make the point again that we work case by case and we take into account all the circumstances that are relevant.

- Q31 **Stuart C. McDonald:** On that note, let's say an Afghan interpreter or somebody else who has not managed to get on to one of the Government schemes does cross in a dinghy and the only members of their family outside Afghanistan that they know are here. Are things like that—the fact that they have family here and nowhere else—going to be taken into account in decision making?

Tom Pursglove: Again, I would make the point that in terms of Afghanistan, there are established safe and legal routes via which people should come to the United Kingdom.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Stuart C. McDonald: Well, if they can get on them.

Tom Pursglove: Nobody should be getting in a small boat—

Stuart C. McDonald: But they do.

Tom Pursglove: —to come to the UK, because they are leaving safe countries with fully functioning asylum systems and taking all the risk that comes with that. What I'm not willing to do, and what I won't do, is to say or do anything that gives credence to that evil business model.

Q32 **Stuart C. McDonald:** I have heard your argument, and obviously we take different views on that. I just want to know this. Is the fact that the Afghan interpreter has family members here taken into account in decision making, Mr Hobbs?

Dan Hobbs: In decision making, we will obviously take account of our article 8 obligations under ECHR, along with all our other ECHR obligations. So, in the individual decision making, if there are obstacles that would contravene our obligations under ECHR article 8 or any other article, then that would be taken into account in the final decision, on a case-by-case basis.

Q33 **Stuart C. McDonald:** You also mentioned or made a comparison with the Dublin arrangements, but that is slightly different. You don't need to go through a lengthy process to establish whether, for example, somebody is LGBT or a victim of trafficking before necessarily being able to establish whether it might be safe to make a return under Dublin, although there are concerns about the Dublin process, too. The point is that you are removing people to Rwanda and you are going to have to make these assessments, and at the moment, it takes you weeks; in fact it takes you months and years, often, to establish whether somebody is LGBT or at risk. How can we possibly be satisfied that undertaking this sort of assessment in weeks is going to get to the bottom of some of these issues and ensure that you are only removing people that it is safe to remove to Rwanda?

Tom Pursglove: I can give the Committee the reassurance that we will act with great care—with the assistance, of course, of experienced case workers—to work through those issues appropriately.

Q34 **Stuart C. McDonald:** How many case workers are going to be working on this?

Tom Pursglove: I am not in a position to give you a precise figure on this, but of course what we have is a team of case workers who work on asylum-related matters every day of the year, who will be working on this and will be making appropriate decisions about individual cases.

Q35 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Can you tell me more about how this is going to be done? Is it a screening interview—a two-hour interview, and that is it? There is supposed to be access to legal advice, but what form does that take? Is it a phone call? Where are the people going to be when this process is undertaken? Can you give us some detail on that, Mr Hobbs?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dan Hobbs: Again, it will depend on the individual circumstances. Obviously, we have a range of accommodation, and people will have access to legal aid, as they would in the normal way under inadmissibility. Migrants who arrive in the UK have access through the legal aid procedure, subject to the standard merits and affordability tests. That is how they will access legal aid.

As I say, the case worker will do the screening interview. They will gather information from the individual, and they will have the opportunity to bring further representations in the seven or 14-day window once we have notified them of our intention to relocate them either to Rwanda or to any other country to which we have a safe ability to return them. Further, you will be aware that when we set removal directions, there is a further period in which people are notified that they can bring any further representations that they wish to bring.

- Q36 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Two things on that, though. The idea that people have proper access to legal representation within seven or 14 days when they are Napier barracks or the new centre that has been built is for the birds. At most, when you speak to people there, they are lucky to get a 60-second phone call with a solicitor. Can you tell me about the work that the Home Office is going to do to make sure people have proper access to legal advice and will be able to make submissions? Are you seriously saying to me that submissions within 14 days, following up after an interview, are enough to be able to come to a conclusion about whether somebody is LGBT or a victim of trafficking, for example? That can't be done in that timescale, can it?

Tom Pursglove: We will work case by case to make appropriate decisions, taking into account all those vulnerabilities and considerations, as you would rightly expect. We will make sure people can access the legal advice that they need in the way that Mr Hobbs set out. Of course, it is imperative that that is the case and that it is done in the way that we all want to see, because we want this policy to succeed. It is absolutely right and proper that we deliver that correctly, because that is fundamental to making sure this policy is delivered in the way that we want.

- Q37 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But there is absolutely nothing to suggest that the Home Office has the capacity to do that. Another category is unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, or age-disputed children. There are hundreds of cases every year where the Home Office says someone is an adult, and then after an age assessment process it is decided that they are a child. If someone is challenging a decision that they are an adult, will you wait for the outcome of that challenge, including judicial review or appeal under the recent Act?

Tom Pursglove: You will of course recognise—we have debated this many times—that we are introducing considerable reform in the age-assessment space because we think it is important that we do that, particularly for safeguarding reasons that flow in both directions. Those matters must be concluded, of course, before someone is relocated to Rwanda. Again, it is right and proper that there is a proper process where



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that can be considered. What I don't want to do is get into a running debate about cohorts, because all that serves to do is tip a wink to evil criminal gangs about where they may target vulnerabilities and try to exploit them.

Q38 Stuart C. McDonald: You are going to have to make the policy public at some point. How can you have a policy if you don't even know what it is?

Tom Pursglove: I would refer you back, Mr McDonald, to comments I have made previously about children—unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, in particular—in various debates that we have had.

Q39 Stuart C. McDonald: In terms of capacity—Simon Fell asked you about this—it is not just about how many the UK Government wants to send, but about how many Rwanda can accept. Am I right in thinking that, over the last three or four years, the Rwandan asylum decision-making body has made between 37 and 307 decisions each year? Is that a reflection of the numbers, roughly, that we can expect to be sent to Rwanda, if that is all they have the capacity to process?

Tom Pursglove: This is an uncapped scheme, and we will work with the Rwandan Government to deliver places.

Q40 Stuart C. McDonald: In principle, but in reality, you can't just say, "We are sending 5,000 this year." They can say, "Nope, we are taking 20 or 50." In the last few years, they have managed between 37 and 307 decisions each year.

Tom Pursglove: This is a partnership, and it has to be progressed in the spirit of partnership. That is why we will continue to have close constructive dialogue to make sure—

Q41 Stuart C. McDonald: Isn't that the crux of the matter? That is pretty much one week of channel crossings. How are you going to deter anybody if in reality you are sending to Rwanda one in several hundred?

Tom Pursglove: Obviously, a lot of this will depend on the flow of migrants that we see. We will continue to work with the Rwandan Government to deliver the places that we need to deliver the deterrent effect that is required to put to a stop these dangerous journeys. There is already, as I have set out previously, accommodation available for this purpose. That is kept under constant review. The Rwandan Government recognise—I think they should be commended very much for this—that this a global issue that needs global solutions. They want to play their part in helping us to preserve life; they are as troubled as I am about the loss of life that we have seen.

Q42 Stuart C. McDonald: There hasn't been a lot of capacity to do what you are wanting to do. Throughout the passage of debates on this, you were always very clear that you are keen to ensure, and that you have been satisfied, that what the Government is doing is in accordance with our obligations under the refugee convention. If it were to be found by a court that that is not the case, presumably you would then review the policy in an attempt to make sure it would be compliant with the refugee



HOUSE OF COMMONS

convention.

Tom Pursglove: Can I just pick up on the earlier point that you raised around Rwanda and capacity? It is worth pointing out that Rwanda has hosted a total of 127,000 refugees and asylum seekers at the end of January 2022—

Q43 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But these are people in refugee camps under the auspices of the UNHCR. You are talking about processing asylum seekers through a body that managed between 37 and 307 cases a year.

Tom Pursglove: Let me be very clear that the model that we are delivering with the Rwandans is not a camps-based, detention-based model. I think it is important that that is on the record and is made very clear. The point I was making is that clearly the Rwandan Government have expertise and experience of providing refuge and sanctuary for a very considerable number of people.

Q44 **Stuart C. McDonald:** But not in making decisions at that scale. Your own assessment of their asylum decision-making body is not particularly positive.

Tom Pursglove: That is why we are resourcing this properly through the agreement.

Q45 **Stuart C. McDonald:** You said it was very important to you that the Government fulfil their obligations under the refugee convention. If a court decided that this scheme was not in accordance with the refugee convention, I assume that you would revisit the policy and make it convention compliant, if required.

Tom Pursglove: We will abide by our international obligations at all times, as I have consistently set out, and I believe that this policy is compliant with those international obligations.

Q46 **Ms Abbott:** Minister, you and your civil servant colleague mentioned Australia. Let's talk about Israel. In 2014 to 2017, Israel sent 4,000 refugees to Rwanda. The UNHCR said in 2017 "that these persons have not found adequate safety or a durable solution to their plight and that many have subsequently attempted dangerous onward movements within Africa or to Europe." Among their problems were the fact that they were unable to speak the language, they didn't understand the culture and finding work was nearly impossible, so by 2018, only nine of the original 4,000 were left in Rwanda. How can you be sure that your Rwanda scheme will not end up like that?

Tom Pursglove: I have made this point, but it is worth reiterating that this is not just a migration partnership; this is an economic development and migration partnership. This is about providing opportunity in Rwanda for people to have prosperous and successful lives, where that sanctuary is provided and protection is provided in Rwanda for those who seek it, and there is support around skills, jobs, integration and capacity building. That is entirely why this policy has been developed in the way that it has,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to make sure that people are able to have that longer-term sanctuary, if that is what they themselves wish to have.

Q47 **Ms Abbott:** And who will be paying for this support around jobs and better assimilation? Will it be the Rwandans, or will it be the UK?

Tom Pursglove: It is, of course, for the Rwandan Government to make appropriate decisions in Rwanda about the support that they provide and the way that that is delivered. It would not be for me to be prescriptive to them about the form that that takes, but of course we continue to have—

Q48 **Ms Abbott:** I am asking who will pay for it, Minister.

Tom Pursglove: The point is that there is this £120 million contribution that has made at the outset, and we will continue to provide support as part of the processing of cases, akin to the sums of money that we spent on this currently in the United Kingdom. I go back to this point, because I suspect that you would be one of the first people to criticise if we were trying to do this in a way that, I would argue, you would probably put as being on the cheap. What we are doing is making sure that this is properly funded and properly set up, because we see that economic development piece as being equally important to the migration issue as well.

Q49 **Ms Abbott:** Are you able to give us information about how this ongoing integration will be set up? It is one thing to say you want it to be like that, but are you able to provide the information as to how?

Tom Pursglove: I think that will become clearer as the partnership develops. I go back to the point that the Rwandan Government have a long track record of providing sanctuary in their country for people seeking it. They have done that in co-operation with the UNHCR and the European Union—for example, through the emergency transit mechanism. There will be continued and constant dialogue with the Rwandans. There is a commitment to deliver skills, jobs and integration. It is right that we are not prescriptive about what that looks like, and it is right that the Rwandan Government take the lead in delivering it, but our commitment is fundamental in backing that, because we want to see people properly supported and we want to see them prosper and succeed if they are relocated to Rwanda.

Q50 **Ms Abbott:** You say that Rwanda has a great record on this but, as I mentioned right at the beginning, Israel sent 4,000 refugees there between 2014 and 2017. By 2018, only nine of them were left in Rwanda, so its record cannot be that good.

Tom Pursglove: It isn't clear what arrangements the Israelis may or may not have had with the Rwandan Government, or any other Government, around the resettlement of individuals, so it is very difficult to comment authoritatively. But what I do know—again, I have made this point consistently, but it bears repeating—is that this is an economic development and migration partnership that is world-leading and that is the first of its kind. I suspect that other countries will deliver similar schemes in future, and we know that European countries are already having negotiations and discussions about this. I would argue that this is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

markedly different from the sorts of comparisons that you are trying to draw.

Q51 **Ms Abbott:** Is it markedly different from the Israeli scheme?

Tom Pursglove: I would argue so, yes.

Q52 **Ms Abbott:** I have just one more question. This scheme has been presented as a panacea for the people coming over in small boats. Will it be only for people coming over in small boats, or will it be for any inadmissible refugee or asylum seeker?

Tom Pursglove: I am afraid I have to correct you. At no point have I ever said that this is a panacea; I have always said that this is a difficult issue. It is a difficult problem and a stubborn problem, and it has to stop. We have to get this under control, and we have to preserve life, which is precisely what we are doing. All the individuals making these crossings at the moment are coming from what are safe countries, and there is no single intervention that will resolve it. Again, that is an important distinction to make. I would argue that this will shift the dynamic and genuinely help to deter these journeys. That, in itself, is to be commended. We did have to think about this in an outside-the-box way. This is not by any means a panacea that will resolve the issue, but it will make a significant contribution in shifting the dial.

Q53 **Ms Abbott:** Minister, maybe I should not have mentioned the small boats at all. I am asking you something very specific.

Tom Pursglove: The answer to that—

Ms Abbott: Let me finish, so that you understand my question. Is the Rwandan scheme for any inadmissible—as you term it—refugee or asylum seeker?

Tom Pursglove: What we are talking about here is people who make dangerous and unnecessary journeys to the United Kingdom, as I set out: those who are leaving what are safe countries and putting their lives at risk in doing so. That includes small boat arrivals and people coming in the backs of lorries. People should not be making those journeys. That message must go out time and time again. We need to stop people paying evil criminal gangs to get to the United Kingdom, and that is precisely what we are determined to do.

Q54 **Ms Abbott:** For the avoidance of doubt, Minister, this scheme is for any inadmissible refugee or asylum seeker.

Tom Pursglove: This scheme goes back to 1 January 2022, and those who have arrived since then through dangerous and unnecessary journeys are in scope to be relocated to Rwanda. However, I make the point that we will work on a case-by-case basis and the key consideration in every case will be, "Is it safe and appropriate for that individual to be relocated in this way?"

Q55 **Gary Sambrook:** We have spoken about the comparators between other



HOUSE OF COMMONS

countries, and the Australian and Israeli models. With the Australian one, we saw that between 2007 and 2014 there were about 52,000 illegal maritime crossings, of which 20,000 were in the year 2013. Since Operation Sovereign Borders has been in place, that figure has reduced to near enough zero. When comparing our system to the Australian system, are you confident that we can deliver the same sort of results, and what benefits and what elements of the scheme do you think you have adopted into our one?

Tom Pursglove: This is about system change. This is about whole-system reform of the broken asylum system, which has these unacceptable pressures being placed upon it. I have made the point that there is no one single intervention that will resolve this situation of itself. We need to see that quicker caseworking and the ending of uncertainty.

Of course, this country has a proud and rich tradition of providing sanctuary to those in need, and that will continue, but people must come here through safe and legal routes. What we cannot continue to have is this constant cycle of claims that are intended to frustrate removal. That is why the measures in the Act, for example, will help us get to grips with that. This is a whole package of measures that need to be seen together. The Prime Minister added to those during his announcement in Kent a month ago.

I do think that there are lessons that can be learned from the approach that the Australians took. George Brandis's evidence to the Nationality and Borders Bill Committee was really very explicit in setting out the effect that he believes the change in posture made around this. Of course, we study examples of work from around the world to shape the policies that we take forward.

As I said earlier, it is logical to me that if you can render obsolete the business model of these evil criminal gangs, then that of itself acts as a deterrent effect, because what is the point of paying those evil criminal gangs to come to the United Kingdom in the first place? That is precisely what this policy is geared to do.

Q56 **Gary Sambrook:** We have just heard about the Israeli model; I think it is generally accepted that it was not a success. When the Department was looking at different ways to do this, did you go into any great detail in looking at the Israeli model and how we can learn from the failures of that? Looking at the economic development section, which you mentioned, was that a lesson that we learned: to couple the two together to form a thorough partnership between us and Rwanda? Moving on to other countries that are looking at this issue, do you think that Denmark will be looking at what we are doing, and have they been in touch to see what lessons they can learn?

Tom Pursglove: I really do think that other countries are going to have to look at these sorts of models moving forwards, and we know that they are doing so. It is worth making the point that we have been co-operating internationally on these issues to date. Our co-operation with the French,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

which stops considerable numbers of embarkations from happening in the first place, is one example of that. That is important work; it is valued work. That co-operation with the French, for example, needs to deepen further. That is something that we are absolutely convinced that we will continue to explore and see what can be done.

There are lessons to be learned from other examples around the world. We came at this from the perspective of wanting to deliver an economic development partnership along with the migration strand, because we think it is important that we provide proper sanctuary and that we see people who are relocated to Rwanda being supported to make that integration—to have jobs, to have skills and to have those opportunities—because we want this to succeed. Therefore, it is right that this is funded properly, so that that work can be delivered in a bespoke way that meets the needs that exist, and that is a commitment that we have made.

I don't know if Mr Hobbs wants to say any more in terms of approaches from other Governments regarding sharing experience and expertise. We know that there are negotiations going on between other countries about models that are not dissimilar to the sort of model that we are progressing here.

Dan Hobbs: That's right, Minister. Obviously, we have spoken to and had a constant dialogue with the Australians, both in the run-up to and after our agreement. We also have close collaboration with our Danish counterparts and have spoken to them since the agreement.

On Israel, it's really unclear and I think the big difference there to our scheme is that there is a very clear memorandum of understanding between the partnership that is published and that sets out the commitment of both parties to that partnership. That was not the case with the Israel agreement. It is fair to say that our Rwandan colleagues do not recognise some of the numbers that are reported on it. That is a matter for them, but I understand it also was more around failed asylum seekers and relocation, which is obviously distinctly different from our agreement. However, yes, we continue to talk to international partners about the agreement and the approach.

Tom Pursglove: It is worth adding, in the context of all this—I actually said this when I appeared before the Committee two weeks into the role, which seems like a very long time ago; the weeks have passed very quickly—that we absolutely remain committed to trying to secure returns agreements with countries around the world, particularly source countries, to return people back to those countries when they are deemed not to be eligible for asylum in this country. Of course, one of the big ones must be trying to get a returns agreement in place with the European Union, or individual European countries, so that we can really put to bed this terrible, evil criminality that undoubtably funds other criminality that blights not just our society but other societies too. We believe it is very important that, internationally, countries accept their returns.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Again, I would make the point that there is a much wider piece of international work that is ongoing, and that engagement is happening to try and deliver meaningful change in this space, because no one country can resolve this issue. Just as no single intervention can resolve this issue, it is clear to me that, in the time ahead, this is going to become more and more of a migration challenge that affects the whole international community, and we need international solutions to it.

- Q57 **Gary Sambrook:** Thanks. As I am sure you know, the PCS trade union has issued a legal challenge to this, on the basis of a lack of information at the time. Are you now satisfied, given Monday's series of announcements, which padded out more detail, that a lot of the concerns that it may have had in its legal challenge can now be put to rest?

Tom Pursglove: I think it has, of course, provided greater clarity, but I must not comment on what are potentially ongoing legal proceedings. However, I think you have made the point eloquently in saying that more detail has been provided in the last few days.

- Q58 **Gary Sambrook:** Finally, there have been several legal challenges from a number of groups and organisations. Migration Watch UK did point out the popularity of this policy among the general public across the country—I think it was 47% of people who were in favour of this partnership, against 26%. People feel that those legal challenges are frustrating the system. Can you give us any reassurance that the legal challenges will not prolong the amount of time before we can see this partnership and its benefits?

Tom Pursglove: I think it is right, in a democracy, that people are able to bring challenges to policy. That is right and proper, and we see that on a whole range of policy areas under Governments of whatever particular persuasion. What I have said is that I believe that those challenges are baseless, in the sense that we will always act in accordance with our international obligations. By extension, that means that those challenges would be without merit, in my view. However, we will expeditiously work through legal challenges that are thrown up in response to this policy.

Of course, it is also right that individuals are able to make representations around their specific cases, but the Prime Minister has said that we will do what is necessary to make sure that we deliver this policy, because I think that—exactly as you allude to, Mr Sambrook, and I know that you are regularly on the doorsteps in Birmingham—people want to see action in this area. They do not think that it is acceptable that people are making these dangerous journeys and putting their lives at risk. They do not think that it is acceptable that we have spiralling costs in the way that we do. They are frustrated about the lack of alternatives put forward by the critics of this policy, and we are determined to get on and deliver it, exactly as we said we would.

- Q59 **Chair:** Just before I call Tim Loughton, I want to ask, have you concluded any other return agreements since you last appeared before the Committee?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: I think what I will do, if I may, is provide the Committee with a written update around returns agreements and where we are.

Chair: So you have? You think you have concluded—

Tom Pursglove: For example, we of course work on a case-by-case basis to deliver returns—

Chair: No, with countries. Have you concluded any agreements to return people to countries?

Tom Pursglove: If I may, I will provide a written update to the Committee on this, just to provide absolute clarity on it.

Chair: Okay, thank you. Tim Loughton.

Q60 **Tim Loughton:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, I want to talk about procedural details of the partnership arrangement, but can I just ask a couple of questions for clarification, first of all? Is it the case that the scheme is backdated to the beginning of the year, so that anybody who has arrived here since 1 January will be in scope of the scheme?

Secondly, is it an expectation—as we saw before, particularly around Brexit, where people traffickers were telling their potential clients, “You better get on with it because they are changing the law in the UK”—that we might see an uptick in the number of crossings in the short term? People may be conned into thinking that the scheme is not backdated and that they need to get on with it before this new arrangement comes into place.

Tom Pursglove: As ever, Mr Loughton, your finger is on the pulse of the detail. You are absolutely right to say that this scheme dates back to 1 January 2022 and that arrivals through dangerous and unnecessary means are in scope to be included in this policy from that date. In terms of your second point—

Q61 **Tim Loughton:** Previously when there has been a change in circumstances, particularly with Brexit, there has been an uptick in the short term.

Tom Pursglove: There has been conflicting media reporting, with accounts of individuals saying they are not going to make the journeys and of others saying they are still going to. One thing we do know is that people enter into agreements with these evil criminal gangs—these people smugglers—where they pay the money across. Often, at this stage in the policy, it is not unreasonable to think that those investments have been made and that people will want to follow through by making the crossing. One of the reasons why, candidly, I am not keen to get into the specifics of cohorts, for example, is because we do not want to provide any ammunition that allows those criminal gangs to exploit particular groups of individuals and particular vulnerabilities in a closing-down-sale-type way.

I think this policy, as I have said before, will have the effect of deterring people from making these crossings, but it would be wrong to suggest that



there are not people who are already congregating and who are effectively ready to make those journeys, having already paid for them. I think the impact of this is too difficult to draw firm conclusions from in the short term. In the longer term, I think it will have a significant deterrent effect, but I would not be surprised if what you see in the shorter term is people continuing to make these crossings, because they have already made that investment.

Q62 Tim Loughton: I understand, and I understand why you do not want to give details about the sort of people who may be stopped. I think you have said that you want to make it a lottery, so if you pay to come across, you may end up in Kent, but you could end up in Rwanda, and that is part of the deterrent factor.

Can I look at the partnership arrangements? As you have said, this is quite an elaborate, long-term economic partnership with Rwanda. As part of the arrangements, there is a joint committee to monitor and oversee the implementation of the policy. Secondly, there is a monitoring committee. Obviously, this Committee has concerns about how we and Parliament will scrutinise these arrangements.

As you know, in the past we have scrutinised asylum seeker accommodation in this country and produced some quite hard-hitting reports. We can easily visit accommodation and have done so, and we can have the people responsible for it in front of us. We need to be assured that Parliament—albeit slightly differently, because of the geography of this—will have comparable scrutiny of these arrangements.

Can you tell us about the nature of this joint committee? Who are the co-chairs? Will it be representatives from the UK and Rwanda who will sit on it? Has it met already? What is the proposal?

Tom Pursglove: There are two committees that are relevant to this partnership. The first is the joint committee, which is broadly made up of officials. It actually replicates similar committees that we have between, for example, the UK and France and the UK and the US. That assures the operation of the partnership. It is likely to meet several times a year but, as I have said, there is this ongoing dialogue that happens virtually every day between officials in Rwanda and the United Kingdom on these matters. There is also the monitoring committee.

Q63 Tim Loughton: Before you move on to the monitoring committee, can we just deal with the joint committee? First, it has not met yet. Secondly, have the co-chairs been appointed? Thirdly, how transparent will it be about its workings to this Committee and to Parliament? Will you be publishing its minutes on a regular basis? What is the intention?

Tom Pursglove: We will say more in due course about the specific arrangements for this committee. Obviously, we are beginning to operationalise the policy. Mr Hobbs may have more that he can add on this, but we will say more in due course.

On the point about reporting to Parliament, I suspect that this Committee will make some recommendations in its report, which I would be happy to



consider. We will undoubtedly say more about those matters in due course.

- Q64 **Tim Loughton:** Do you think it is reasonable that that committee should have an obligation to report to not only the Home Office, but Parliament, with a regular reporting mechanism—half-yearly reports, annual reports or otherwise—in the same way as other bodies in the UK within the remit of the Home Office would have reporting responsibilities to Parliament? I understand that the full detail has not been worked out yet. However, in principle, do you think it is important that it should report to Parliament?

Tom Pursglove: It is obviously a partnership, so it would require agreement with the Rwandans around the detail of disclosure, for example. You have made the point around what you would like to see happen, and I will gladly look at any recommendations the Committee makes. Of course, both the Home Secretary and I will be regularly available to colleagues at the Dispatch Box at Home Office questions and various other opportunities as the policy is developed. There will be scrutiny in the usual way, as you would expect. However, this is a partnership and therefore it is not something we are in a position to announce unilaterally, so those arrangements would need to be discussed. We will say more on that in due course.

- Q65 **Tim Loughton:** I understand. However, it is really important that, in principle, the committee should be accountable to Parliament—not least because this policy is controversial and distanced, in terms of us being able to monitor it—and that it should be part of the arrangements with the Rwandans that the committees need to be as transparent as possible to both our Parliaments, because the Rwandans will also have questions from their own electorate about the way this is operating. We are not going to make recommendations. We need to have your proposals as to how you will be scrutinised by Parliament. Can you talk about the monitoring committee? Again, I am presuming that it has not yet been formed, so it has not met or got chairs or terms of reference. Is that right? If so, when will those terms of reference be published?

Tom Pursglove: The monitoring committee will be independent. It will monitor and report to the joint committee on the implementation of the scheme. It is about providing proper oversight to aid that assurance. You might be able to add a bit more around this, Mr Hobbs.

Dan Hobbs: As is set out in the memorandum of understanding, it will report to the joint committee. We are in advanced discussions with our Rwandan colleagues about the appointments to that. We have very regular meetings and have had discussions with them over many months as we have arrived at this. I anticipate that the first formal meeting of the joint committee will happen in the coming weeks, which will then set the process around the terms of reference, and then the terms of reference for the monitoring committee. There is a sequencing of those elements. We are discussing, both with the Rwandans and internally in the Home Office, what those measures and those terms of reference will be.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q66 **Tim Loughton:** The Minister just mentioned that it would be independent. What does that mean?

Dan Hobbs: As set out in the memorandum of understanding, the monitoring committee will be composed of persons independent of both participants. That ostensibly means that people not employed directly by the Governments will sit on the monitoring committee—as opposed to the joint committee, which, as it says in the MOU, will be composed of representatives of the Rwandan and UK Governments.

Q67 **Tim Loughton:** So, what sort of people would you envisage sitting on it? Would there be representatives of refugee organisations on the monitoring committee, for example?

Dan Hobbs: I think we still have to agree and decide, alongside our partners, to nominate and identify the relevant individuals for that monitoring committee.

Q68 **Tim Loughton:** Okay, but who would the Home Office envisage nominating, subject to agreement with the Rwandans? Would it include refugee organisations?

Dan Hobbs: I think that is a matter that we have to agree with the Home Secretary and Ministers at this stage. We are still discussing that with the Rwandan Government. To respect the partnership, we need to agree that collectively.

Q69 **Tim Loughton:** One final question to go back to where I started, Minister. What has the French reaction to this been, given that France has the singular ability to stop this trade overnight and has declined to do so? Do you envisage us no longer paying the French large sums of money to stop people coming across the channel, which they have singularly failed to achieve thus far?

Tom Pursglove: The point I would make on that is that there has obviously been quite a lot going on in the French system of late, given the elections, but it is fair to say that internationally, what we have seen is quite a lot of interest in what we have agreed, and quite a lot of curiosity about the form this will take and the impact we think it will have. As I have said, I think this will be the first of a number of partnerships like this that countries around the world will adopt in order to tackle these global migration challenges, and of course, we continue to have ongoing dialogue. I had a meeting last week with my Belgian counterpart, and I think it is important that we share learning, best practice and ideas.

I would somewhat reject the point you made about the co-operation with the French, which I do think makes a meaningful contribution to stopping some of these embarkations from happening in the first place—around 50%.

Q70 **Tim Loughton:** The numbers have gone up, Minister.

Tom Pursglove: So far this year we have had 6,500 interceptions, and those journeys have, of course, been prevented from happening. That is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

valuable co-operation, but ultimately, where we must get to—I know you share my view on this—is a position where people are not making these crossings. The way we do that is by delivering this scheme with Rwanda, by continuing to progress negotiations around returns agreements with source countries and with the EU and European countries, and by delivering the package of measures through the Borders Act to really clamp down on this evil criminality and put a stop to it once and for all. When we have achieved that, of course, that will mean that co-operation in the form you have set out would not be required, because those journeys would no longer be happening.

Q71 Chair: Will the monitoring committee be established before anyone is sent to Rwanda?

Tom Pursglove: We will announce details in due course. I cannot give you a precise date around this. As I say, at the moment, nobody has been relocated to Rwanda, but I would hope we will be able to say more about those monitoring arrangements soon.

Chair: Okay. It was remiss of me at the beginning not to welcome Joanna Cherry, who is a member of the Human Rights Committee and is guesting with us today. I am now going to move to Joanna to ask some questions.

Q72 Joanna Cherry: Thank you very much, Chair; thank you for having me. Good morning, Minister. The US State Department, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have all reported evidence in 2020-21 of unlawful or arbitrary killings, forced disappearances and torture committed by the Rwandan Government. Do you accept the evidence that these acts have been committed by the Rwandan Government?

Tom Pursglove: The point that I would make is that overall, Rwanda is a safe and secure country for the resettlement of individuals. I think it is noteworthy that Rwanda is committed to the convention and that, for example, the UNHCR has been working with the Rwandan Government through the transit mechanism to place refugees in Rwanda. I think you yourself would recognise the expertise that the UNHCR has in these matters, and it is key to point out that of course, through the CPIT report—which is a comprehensive report—there are no systematic breaches of human rights obligations.

Q73 Joanna Cherry: That does not really answer my question. My question was, do you accept the evidence set out by the US State Department—one of our major allies—and Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which are both very internationally respected NGOs? Do you accept the evidence that there have been unlawful or arbitrary killings in Rwanda and forced disappearances and torture committed by the Rwandan Government? Do you or do you not accept that evidence?

Tom Pursglove: We have been very clear through the CPIN report in setting out various concerns that have been raised internationally around those sorts of issues, but I go back to the point that fundamentally, we do



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not believe there are systematic breaches of human rights in a way that would mean that this policy would be inappropriate.

- Q74 **Joanna Cherry:** How have you reached that view? What assessment have you made that leads you to believe that asylum seekers who are removed to Rwanda will not face potential human rights breaches? What work have you done to counter the evidence that has come from the US State Department and the other organisations that I mentioned?

Tom Pursglove: What I can tell you is that I know that the work of the country teams, in drawing up that sort of guidance, is considered to be authoritative by the courts and thoroughly professional and high quality. The report is clear that there is no systematic/systemic breach. I am content that that work has been carried out thoroughly and appropriately. I again make the point that, for example, the UNHCR—who you have regularly cited as being authoritative on these matters—place refugees in Rwanda through the transit mechanism. I think that demonstrates that there is a broad consensus around that finding in the report.

- Q75 **Joanna Cherry:** You are very focused on saying that there is no systemic evidence, but my specific question to you was whether you recognised the evidence set out by the US State Department, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and whether you yourself had carried out any assessment to satisfy yourselves that there are not human rights breaches in Rwanda.

Tom Pursglove: I am satisfied overall. I think that it is right that the CPIN report is candid, that it does set out various instances that have been raised in international forums and by other countries, and that we look at this in the round. I would argue that at the core of this policy is our determination that we must live up to our international obligations through both the convention and the ECHR, and, of course, it is crucial that the Rwandans live up to their human rights obligations too.

- Q76 **Joanna Cherry:** You mentioned the United Nations a moment ago. The UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture have noted a refusal by Rwanda to co-operate with them. Do you think that indicates any problem with adequately assessing the risk of breaches of article 3 for asylum seekers in Rwanda?

Tom Pursglove: Rwanda will process claims in accordance with the UN refugee convention and national and international human rights laws. It will ensure protection from inhuman and degrading treatment and from being returned to the place from which individuals originally fled. We could not be clearer about this.

- Q77 **Joanna Cherry:** I am going to ask you some questions in a minute about what we can do if Rwanda does not do that. What I specifically asked you there was, do you think that Rwanda's refusal to co-operate with the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture indicates any problem with adequately assessing the risk of human rights breaches in Rwanda, particularly regarding article 3?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: I refer you to my earlier answer that the Rwandans are determined to live up to their international obligations—as are we.

Q78 **Joanna Cherry:** Do I take it that you are not concerned that Rwanda has refused to co-operate with the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture—that that does not concern the British Government?

Tom Pursglove: What I would say is that, as a UK Government, we have proper and thorough engagement with our international partners and with those international bodies. I would of course encourage countries around the world to have similar constructive dialogues.

Q79 **Joanna Cherry:** I am going to read you something the US State Department has said about Rwanda. “The government was often intolerant of public reports of human rights abuses and suspicious of local and international human rights observers, and it often impeded independent investigations and rejected criticism as biased and uninformed...Individuals who contributed to international reports on human rights reported living under constant fear that the government could arrest and prosecute them for the contents of their work.” That comes from the US State Department—our major ally. Do their findings about the Rwandan Government’s attitude towards human rights observers concern you at all?

Tom Pursglove: I think this is where, for example, the joint committee arrangement that I have just commented on is significant in terms of satisfying ourselves, as a UK Government, that all of the aspects of the partnership are being upheld in the way that we would all want to see. I make the point again that the Rwandans, rather like we are, are committed and determined to act in accordance with those international obligations.

I would add, “The joint committee will determine the process for access to facilitate and ensure that the Monitoring Committee formed in accordance with paragraph 15 has unfettered access to the following for the purposes of completing their assessments and reports: the locations they are required to inspect under their terms of reference, save that a relocated person may refuse them entry to their private accommodation if they do not wish it to be inspected...relevant officials, employees and agents of both Participants for interview...any other person they may wish to interview who is willing to be interviewed...the records held in relation to Relocated Individuals at all stages of the relocation process from the initial screening by the United Kingdom up to and including the asylum process as well as records of decisions taken about them...records of grants and refusals of refugee status and of appeals raised against refusals of refugee status and their outcome...records of any procedures that directly impact Relocated Individuals, and...records of all complaints made by Relocated Individuals and the outcomes.”

So I would argue that there is proper scrutiny around these arrangements that has been formalised or is being formalised through the establishment



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of these committees. It will allow us to satisfy ourselves that things are being dealt with in a way that we believe to be fitting of the partnership.

Q80 Joanna Cherry: Okay. What happens if the monitoring committee or the joint committee find out that there are human rights breaches in Rwanda in relation to these asylum seekers that we have sent there? What recourse, remedy or penalty will there be?

Tom Pursglove: I am not going to speculate on hypotheticals.

Joanna Cherry: It is not a hypothetical.

Tom Pursglove: It is a hypothetical.

Joanna Cherry: Okay, it is a hypothetical, but it is a very important question as to enforcement. I am asking you about how the human rights of these people that we are going to deport to Rwanda will be protected. You are putting great store by the monitoring committee or the joint committee. I am saying to you: if the monitoring committee or the joint committee find that there have been human rights breaches in relation to asylum seekers sent there, what recourse or remedy will there be for those asylum seekers under the agreement that you have reached with Rwanda? It is a question of enforcement, Minister. It is really important.

Tom Pursglove: Yes. You will recognise that this is a memorandum of understanding, which means that either party has the ability to terminate that agreement accordingly.

Q81 Joanna Cherry: But it is not binding under international law, is it?

Tom Pursglove: That is correct.

Q82 Joanna Cherry: So what happens if Rwanda doesn't comply with its obligations either under the memorandum of understanding or the refugee convention, or acts in a way that would be contrary to the European convention on human rights? Is this memorandum of understanding worth the paper it's written on from the point of view of enforcement if your high hopes for human rights protections in Rwanda are not realised?

Tom Pursglove: I believe it is worth the paper it's written on, but it would of course be for the British Government and Ministers to decide what was appropriate in those circumstances.

Q83 Joanna Cherry: What about the individuals? What about the men and women, including—I will ask you about this in a minute—same-sex-attracted people and transgender people that we are planning on deporting to Rwanda? We will come on to that in a minute. What about these men and women?

Tom Pursglove: This isn't deportation—just to be very clear.

Q84 Joanna Cherry: Let's not quibble about that. We are going to send these asylum seekers to Rwanda and you are satisfied that Rwanda is not a country that abuses human rights, but what happens if you are wrong?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

How do these individuals enforce their rights if their human rights are breached? For example, if a lesbian who is sent to Rwanda finds herself being discriminated against or abused on the grounds of her same-sex attraction, there are no anti-gay discrimination laws in Rwanda, so how does she enforce her rights?

Tom Pursglove: There is, of course, a non-discrimination law that runs right through everything that is done in Rwanda. That is a key concept of their laws and their constitution, and I think that is a welcome thing. I go back to a point that I have made previously, but which is important in this regard: nobody will be relocated.

To be clear, this isn't deportation because deportation relates to foreign criminals. We will have a situation where individuals will only be relocated to Rwanda if it is safe and appropriate for them. That is an appropriate safeguard that will see cases screened on an individual, case-by-case basis, taking into account all of the relevant circumstances. As I have said, in the Rwandan asylum system, people will be processed if they wish to enter the Rwandan asylum system and they will have access to legal advice as part of that.

Q85 **Joanna Cherry:** Have you seen the Foreign Office travel advice for Rwanda?

Tom Pursglove: Yes.

Q86 **Joanna Cherry:** And have you seen that it says, "individuals can experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities. There are no specific anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT individuals" in Rwanda. That is right, isn't it? That is what we advise British people travelling to Rwanda.

Tom Pursglove: It is fair to say that Rwanda is one of the safest countries in the world in terms of crime.

Q87 **Joanna Cherry:** I am asking you a specific question. A moment ago you told us there were anti-discrimination laws in Rwanda, and I asked you particularly about same-sex-attracted people and transgender people, but your Government—

Tom Pursglove: Again, I go back to the point that people will not be relocated if it is unsafe for them.

Q88 **Joanna Cherry:** Hang on a second, Minister. Your Government's Foreign Office travel advice advises LGBT British citizens who are planning to go to Rwanda that there are "no specific anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT individuals" and that they may "experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities." So how does that sit with what you just told me a moment ago?

Tom Pursglove: There is an anti-discrimination law that runs through the constitution of Rwanda like a stick of rock. Again, I would make the point that cases will be judged on a case-by-case basis as to whether it is appropriate and safe for those individuals to be removed to Rwanda.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

- Q89 Joanna Cherry:** I get that you are going to do it on a case-by-case basis. My colleague Mr McDonald asked you some questions about how thorough your assessments are going to be, but what I am asking you now is this: what happens if you have determined after your case-by-case assessment that it is safe to send an individual to Rwanda—let us take again my example of a lesbian, a same-sex attracted woman? I think the Home Secretary originally said that she was not going to send LGBT people to Rwanda, but we now know from the documents published on Monday that you are going to send them there. If you send a lesbian there and she finds herself discriminated against—you have told us that there are no specific anti-discrimination laws that protect LGBT individuals in Rwanda—what is her recourse? What is her remedy? That is what I am asking you. Once those people have got there, if they are discriminated against and their human rights are breached, what is their remedy? There is nothing in the memorandum of understanding and there are no anti-discrimination laws in Rwanda. What is their remedy?
- Tom Pursglove:** I would again make the point that the CPIN report is clear that there is no systemic breach of human rights in Rwanda.
- Q90 Joanna Cherry:** I am not asking you about systemic breaches. I am asking you about what happens if an individual you have sent there suffers a human rights breach. What is their remedy?
- Tom Pursglove:** At what point?
- Q91 Joanna Cherry:** After they get there. What is their remedy?
- Tom Pursglove:** As I have said, people within the asylum system in Rwanda will be able to access legal advice. That is built into the arrangements. That is right and proper. Of course, no doubt people will be able to bring complaints in the usual way if they believe they have been discriminated against or treated appallingly.
- Q92 Joanna Cherry:** We seem to have a bit of a disconnect between the advice that was given on Monday, your advice about, for example, LGBT rights in Rwanda, and the advice we give to British citizens travelling there. I wonder whether you could write to us to clarify it.
- Tom Pursglove:** I am very happy to take away the points that the Committee has made. I again go back to the point that, overall, our assessment is that there aren't systemic breaches of human rights.
- Chair:** Okay. We have heard that several times now. I think it would be best to have a response in writing. Joanna, do you want to ask one last question? Then I am going to move on to Lee Anderson.
- Q93 Joanna Cherry:** I have one last general question based on what we are talking about. You have agreed with me that the memorandum of understanding is not binding under international law. If obligations under the assurances part of that agreement as to treatment of post-asylum decisions or access for inspection, monitoring and the provision of legal services are not met, what recourse, remedy or penalty will there be for each participant and the UK Government? Again, I think that is



something that you might want to write to us about.

Tom Pursglove: Again, I go back to the point that if there were concerns raised about the application of the partnership, it would be for Ministers to decide appropriately, at that time, what their response to that would be. We will have these oversight arrangements in place so that the assurance of the partnership takes place. I do not envisage those sorts of issues arising, but Ministers will make appropriate decisions in the circumstances were that to arise.

Q94 **Lee Anderson:** Our inboxes have been full of messages about this problem over the past 18 months or so. You have spent a lot of time, effort and money trying to get a plan in place, but it has got to work if we are going to spend all this money and try to sell it to the British public. My concern about this plan is that, when you inform these economic migrants, asylum seekers, or whatever they pretend to be, that they could be sent to Rwanda, what is to stop them disappearing and never being seen again in this country?

Tom Pursglove: Thank you for your support for the policy, Mr Anderson. Let us take the situation at Dover as a practical example. People arrive at Dover via a small boat. They are then processed through the Western Jetfoil arrangement and taken to Manston, where screening occurs and biometric checks are made. That is exactly right and proper. It will then be determined whether individuals are appropriate to be relocated through this scheme to Rwanda, but there are of course a couple of important powers that we have at our disposal to ensure that people do not abscond in this way. We have detention powers and we also have mandatory reporting requirements that can be placed on people. This is not anything new; this is standard practice under successive Governments to facilitate removals. Of course, they apply in relation to this, rather like they do in relation to removals more generally.

Q95 **Lee Anderson:** Are there any who are detained at the moment?

Tom Pursglove: My understanding is that there are individuals who are detained at the moment. Of course, we have people in detention all the time—that is a fact—because we facilitate removals from the United Kingdom virtually every day of the week.

Q96 **Lee Anderson:** We have a worldwide problem with displaced people, as you know, and we see Ukrainian families coming here. They come here because their country is at war. We see Afghan people coming here—obviously, we know why that is. It is very visible. We see women and children coming from Ukraine. I have next-door neighbours who have just taken in a Ukrainian family. But it seems that 90% or more of the people crossing the channel are young men who are not from these countries. What assessments, if any, have been done as to why it is 90% young men, and why are they leaving a safe country—France—and risking their lives?

Tom Pursglove: All of the individuals who are making the dangerous crossings from France are doing so in the knowledge that they are leaving



HOUSE OF COMMONS

what are safe countries, so they are essentially making proactive choices— asylum shopping, as you could describe it—and could reasonably have received sanctuary prior to making that terrible, dangerous journey. You are as troubled as I am about the fact that we have individuals who are putting their lives in the hands of evil criminal gangs and paying money to them. That is then funding other criminality, which blights our society and other societies across the globe. That has to stop. We cannot continue as we are.

The status quo is not acceptable, and it is fair to say that individuals doing this makes it harder for us to be able to properly care for and support individuals who come through the established safe and legal routes. It means that some of those individuals are seeking to jump the queue, whereby those who come legally and appropriately are then disadvantaged relative to them. That is not right. As you so rightly alluded to when you mentioned your neighbours, the generosity of spirit that we have shown, particularly in relation to the situation in Ukraine, is very striking. It speaks to the fact that what the British people want is a fair but firm system whereby people are treated fairly, they must play by the rules, and the risk to life that we are seeing in the backs of lorries and on small boats comes to an end once and for all. That is precisely what the policies are directed at trying to achieve.

Q97 Lee Anderson: I have just one more question, Minister. I have a friend who spends a significant amount of time working in Rwanda, especially Kigali. He tells me it is a safe, decent and nice country. It is one of the safest countries he has been to. With that in mind, how can we better promote Rwanda as a possible destination for people who are genuinely seeking asylum?

Tom Pursglove: I think that some of the sneering that we have seen about Rwanda in recent weeks has been really regrettable and very disappointing. This is a country that has been on an incredible journey over the course of the last three decades and that has stood up in the international community. It is incredibly troubled—in the way that I am, you are and people across the country are—about people losing their lives by making these perilous crossings. As part of the international community, they want to do something to try to help relieve that. I think that is commendable, and we must do everything we can to help the Rwandans to promote their country as a safe and tolerant place for people to be resettled in. We have seen that work going on quite extensively—I referred earlier in proceedings to figures around the opportunities that the Rwandans have provided to people from other countries to access the protection they are seeking. That is why this is a comprehensive partnership that we have agreed—it is not just about the migration side; it is also about the economic development piece.

As I say, I think they should be commended for the leadership they are showing on this issue. They are as concerned as we are about the loss of life we are seeing. The message you have just relayed is a powerful one and one that we all need to work hard to get out there. Some of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

scaremongering we have seen around this is disappointing, unsatisfactory and, frankly, in many cases wrong.

Lee Anderson: Thank you, Minister.

Q98 **Chair:** There is an urgent question in the Chamber before the start of the home affairs section of the Queen's Speech debate. A number of Members may have to disappear, but we will continue for a few more moments.

I want to pick up on a procedural question about the screening process that will take place. Minister, I think you said that it would happen within a few weeks. I just want to be clear. Not all people going through that screening process will be detained, is that correct?

Tom Pursglove: It is possible that individuals could be detained as part of that.

Q99 **Chair:** Some could be, but you are not expecting everyone to be detained?

Tom Pursglove: Again, I would make the point—this is crucial in all this—that what we do is work on a case-by-case basis, and appropriate arrangements are made depending on the individual and their circumstances.

Q100 **Chair:** But there will be people who will not be detained who will be going through that screening process. I just want to be clear.

Tom Pursglove: That is possible.

Q101 **Chair:** Will the new reception centre at Linton-on-Ouse be used as part of the screening process?

Tom Pursglove: The site at Linton is not at this point intended to be detention accommodation. That is not what is being developed at Linton at the moment.

Q102 **Chair:** So people could be there, going through the screening process, but not be detained—is that correct?

Tom Pursglove: I am not going to get into the specifics of cohorts that may be accommodated.

Q103 **Chair:** I am just trying to understand. During that screening process, if you are not detaining everybody, there will be some people, perhaps at Manston, who will not be detained. That is correct, isn't it?

Tom Pursglove: As I have said, there are people who potentially would not be detained during the duration of that screening process on the basis that it would not be appropriate for them. We would take case-by-case decisions, making sure that circumstances are properly considered.

Q104 **Chair:** So they could disappear if they're not being detained?

Tom Pursglove: That would of course be taken into consideration as one of the factors when making that case-by-case judgment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q105 **Chair:** Just so I understand, if the relocated individuals have gone through the screening process and have been served with the appropriate notices, they will be detained when they are travelling to Rwanda. Is that correct? They will be under the detention of the British Government?

Tom Pursglove: Of course, the distinction is that individuals are the responsibility of the UK Government until effectively the doors open at the other side and people step off the plane. Detention is, of course, an option that we have to facilitate the removal of someone. We only detain people if we believe that there is a realistic prospect of their removal.

Q106 **Chair:** So you can compel people to travel to Rwanda? They will be detained, taken to the aircraft, they will have escorts and they will be sent to Rwanda? That is what you are saying?

Tom Pursglove: That work goes on most days of the week in the Home Office, and this would be no different.

Q107 **Chair:** But I want to know about Rwanda. This is a new policy, and we are trying to get our heads around how it will work.

Tom Pursglove: Individuals could well be detained in order to facilitate their removal.

Q108 **Chair:** "Could well be"?

Tom Pursglove: It is not unreasonable to think that a significant number of people would be detained for that purpose, but, again, we make appropriate arrangements according to the circumstances of the individual. That is established Home Office work that we do consistently around removals generally.

Q109 **Chair:** Okay, but in terms of Rwanda, what you are saying is that you think the majority of people will be detained, escorted to the airport, put on a plane and taken to Rwanda? That is your intention.

Tom Pursglove: I am not going to get any more into the operational specifics of this, but I will refer you to what I said: detention is a power that we have at our disposal in order to facilitate removal from the UK.

Q110 **Chair:** You and the Home Secretary have both said that you won't speak about eligibility criteria in public because you think that it could be used in an inappropriate way. Would you be willing to share that information with the Committee privately?

Tom Pursglove: I would want to go away and consider that point, but I am very anxious that we mustn't do anything that aids and abets these evil criminal gangs, because they will take every opportunity to try to flex around the system, shift their MO and exploit vulnerable people. None of us would want the consequences of that on our shoulders.

Q111 **Chair:** We understand that and I am just asking, as part of the Select Committee's role of scrutiny, to look in private at policies and the eligibility criteria that you are using. That is what I am asking for, so could consider that and come back to us?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: There is, of course, the published policy that is out there, which Committee members and members of the public are able to see.

Q112 **Chair:** That doesn't deal with the eligibility, does it?

Tom Pursglove: It does relate to eligibility, yes.

Q113 **Chair:** But you've been saying today that you wouldn't get into the specifics.

Tom Pursglove: Well, we get into the specifics of case-by-case consideration, taking appropriate decisions in individual cases.

Chair: And that is what we want to see.

Tom Pursglove: Again, I refer members of the Committee to past comments that I have made in the House; I don't think it serves us well to continue to repeat those and to give extra publicity, but I refer you to that.

Q114 **Chair:** As I said, it would be in private. May I just ask you one other question? When the press travelled to Rwanda with the Home Secretary, they were briefed that there were 150 spaces available for people to be removed to Rwanda from the UK. Is that correct, because today you have not given specific figures? Is 150 what you are expecting at the moment?

Tom Pursglove: This is an uncapped scheme and—

Chair: No, but 150 spaces—

Tom Pursglove: There is the potential for thousands of people to be relocated to Rwanda over the lifetime of this agreement.

Q115 **Chair:** I understand that, but at the moment are there 150 spaces available? I think Mr Hobbs might want to comment.

Dan Hobbs: When we were in Rwanda to sign the agreement, the press were taken to one location where the Rwandan Government are proposing to accommodate people as part of their initial accommodation. At that one centre, there were 150 places, maximum. Obviously, it's a matter for the Rwandan Government, but they are looking at a whole range of accommodation options. As the Minister said, the agreement is uncapped, but the centre that the press were taken to is one option that the Rwandan Government are using.

Q116 **Chair:** Thank you. Is there any update on the 100,000 cases that are awaiting asylum decisions? There is a backlog of 100,000, I think. When we last had Ministers in front of us, there was talk about how that was going to be dealt with. Do you have any figures today for where we are with the backlog?

Tom Pursglove: What I would say around that is that, of course, one of the key tenets of the new plan for immigration is to get on and process cases more expeditiously. That is absolutely to the benefit of all concerned—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q117 **Chair:** We understand that, but what are the figures?

Tom Pursglove: What I will do, if I may, is say that Minister Foster is responsible for that work within the Department, so I think it would be more appropriate for me to ask him to provide a full written update, to give you as much information as he is able to provide.

Q118 **Chair:** That would be very helpful, thank you. Could you also let us know about any additional caseworkers who are going to be assigned to the Rwanda policy, because we have heard a lot about the special nature of the work that they will have to undertake in the screening interview? If we could have some details about that, that would be helpful.

You may also want to write to us about the following questions. I want to ask you about the delays to the Home Office visa applications for the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the family scheme. Are you able to update us on how that is going?

Tom Pursglove: The total number of Ukraine scheme visas issued stands at 95,500, which is a considerable number of visas that have been granted. Of course, we have taken various steps along the way to bolster the caseworking around this. Teams have been working around the clock to process these visa applications. We have also made changes along the way to try to make, for example, being able to enrol information in-country more straightforward. That is where the figures currently stand. My understanding from ministerial colleagues who lead on this work within the Department is that we are now at the point where cases are being dealt with relatively expeditiously, as we would all want to see. But again, what I am happy to do is to ask for Ministers in the Department to provide you with a more detailed update on that work, if that would be helpful.

Q119 **Chair:** That would be helpful, and also the actual number of people who have arrived in the UK, so not just visas granted but the number who have arrived, because I think that is of concern.

Tom Pursglove: I can give you those figures. The arrivals via the Ukraine family scheme stand at 17,900, and arrivals via the Ukraine sponsorship scheme stand at 19,500. It is, of course, for individuals to make appropriate decisions for themselves as to whether they wish to travel or not. It is possible that individuals may be seeking sanctuary at the outset in various countries, which then informs their decision. Of course, there are also individuals who perhaps apply but then take a different view and think that they might want to stay close to home. We can only provide the visa—we can't compel people to come—but we have seen that generosity of spirit and we want to provide practical places, which is precisely what we are doing.

Q120 **Chair:** On those figures, it looks like less than half of the visas that have been granted have actually resulted in people arriving.

Tom Pursglove: As I have just set out, there are complex factors that dictate whether people make the journey in the end.

Chair: I understand.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tom Pursglove: But that is where things stand now, in terms of the figures around those various schemes and the number of people who have actually made the trip.

Q121 **Chair:** You will write to the Committee with the details.

Tom Pursglove: I will ask Ministers if there are any further observations that they would like to share at this point.

Chair: That would be helpful.

Q122 **Ms Abbott:** I have a quick question, Minister. We understand that the Home Office has commissioned a history of the Windrush scandal and is in the process of preparing a training module, in response to recommendation 6 of the Wendy Williams lessons learned review. Are you able to let the Committee know, perhaps through writing to us, about the content of either?

Tom Pursglove: I will very happily make inquiries of ministerial colleagues. As Home Office Ministers, we are absolutely committed to acting on Wendy Williams's recommendations. Some of the things that happened under successive Governments in the past were not acceptable. That lessons learned review is important. Those lessons must be learned. If I can share more detail with the Committee around the specific module that you have inquired about, I would be delighted to do so.

Q123 **Chair:** Thank you. Could you also help us with the situation with the Afghans? We have taken a particular interest in the number of Afghans who are in hotels. We know those numbers are still too high. Would you be able to write to us with details about the numbers who are still in hotels and the numbers who have been moved into permanent accommodation?

Tom Pursglove: Yes. In terms of hotel accommodation for Afghans at the moment, I understand that there are 77 hotels with around 12,000 residents. There are complex challenges involved in resolving some of the accommodation issues for Afghans—for example, the fact that often this involves larger family groups than perhaps we would ordinarily see here in the UK—but there is extensive work going on with local authorities. I spoke to my own local authority, North Northamptonshire Council, about this only a couple of weeks ago. Again, what we have seen is that generosity of spirit from local councils and local authorities and communities to try to help with this work.

It is not without its challenges, but one of the reasons that Minister Harrington was appointed was to really try to drive places in the system, so that we can place people, because, clearly, people being in hotel accommodation for extended periods of time is undesirable, for very obvious reasons. The integration side is important. We want people to be able to have sanctuary, to resume their lives and to get on without any needless delay. If I may, it might be that we are able to provide a little bit more information around progress and the interventions that we are making to try to resolve some of those accommodation challenges.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: Thank you very much. We look forward to receiving a number of letters from you about a range of issues we have talked about today. I thank you both for your time. It has been very helpful and instructive for us to learn more about the Government's thinking.

We are very open to carrying on scrutiny of the policy over the next few months. The Committee has already indicated that we would like to visit Rwanda, if people are sent to Rwanda in the coming months. I just put you on notice that we are keen to see this policy once it is operating. Thank you for your time today.