



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

**Responding to
irregular migration:
A diplomatic route:
Government Response
to Committee's First
Report of Session 2019**

**Fifth Special Report of
Session 2019–21**



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The Foreign Affairs Committee

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Fifth Special Report

On 4 November 2019, the Foreign Affairs Committee published its First Report of Session 2019, *Responding to irregular migration: A diplomatic route* (HC 107). The Government's response was received on 21 July 2020 and is appended to this report.

In the Government's Response the Committee's recommendations are shown in **bold** type, and the Government's responses are shown in plain type.

Appendix: Government Response

The UK and Europe

1. Europe's responses to the 2015 "refugee crisis" were often short-term and defensive, rather than strategic. Though arrivals in Europe have decreased sharply from their peak, a fresh outbreak of conflict, or environmental disaster, could cause large-scale irregular arrivals in Europe. It is crucial for the UK, and Europe as a whole, to plan its response to future spikes in arrivals, rather than considering the issue resolved. The UK is leaving the EU but not leaving Europe, and will need to closely coordinate irregular migration policy with European partners after Brexit. In light of this, we were concerned by the lack of detailed answers from the FCO in our oral evidence session. The Minister's inability to identify a single change to UK cooperation with European partners on this issue following Brexit was particularly worrying, and points to a lack of focused attention to this issue. ***We recommend that the UK should move quickly to negotiate close future cooperation on this issue with the EU. This is likely to mean negotiating a replacement for the Dublin Regulation and future, ad hoc participation in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, and could involve taking part in future relocation schemes, on a voluntary basis. During the current delay to our exit from the EU, we call on the Government to urgently resume UK attendance at EU-level meetings where migration is discussed, and to seek to attend these meetings after Brexit, wherever it is possible and in our interests to do so.*** (Paragraph 7)

The FCO agrees with the Committee that the UK needs to closely co-ordinate irregular migration policy with European partners following the UK's EU Exit. The FCO also agrees that the focus should be on planning and building capacity to improve responses to future migration surges.

The UK and EU face many of the same challenges in respect of irregular migration. Irrespective of the terms on which the UK leaves the EU, our objectives remain aligned—to discourage people from making perilous journeys towards and within Europe, to deter secondary movement, and to tackle abuse and organised crime. An effective response to irregular migration requires a cross-border approach—collaboration between the authorities along migrant routes, co-operation in building capacity of the authorities in origin, transit and destination countries, and multilateral efforts to identify and apply best practice in promoting safe, orderly and regular migration.

The Political Declaration [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-withdrawal-agreement-and-political-declaration>] reflects this multi-faceted response. It highlights the need for a new migration relationship with the EU including improved

co-ordination through a strategic dialogue. This is intended, amongst other things, to promote increasing interaction between UK diplomatic and EEAS delegations in origin and transit countries. In very practical terms, we hope that this will allow EU-hosted or EU-chaired discussions of in-country migration advisers to continue to include UK representatives.

The UK is committed to negotiating a new, reciprocal arrangement with the EU for the family reunion of unaccompanied children seeking international protection in either the UK or the EU, where this is in the best interests of the child. This commitment was set out in “The Future Relationship with the EU—the UK’s approach to negotiations”, published on 27 February 2020 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-approach-to-the-future-relationship-with-the-eu>], and in the Act Paper laid before Parliament on 16 March 2020, which constitutes the UK Government’s statement of policy meeting the statutory commitment under Section 37 of the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-family-reunion-policy-statement>]. The UK raised its offer with the European Commission in Round 1 of transition negotiations in March 2020, and negotiations remain ongoing.

Improved co-ordination with the EU is not the only goal. The UK is seeking strengthened migration relationships with EU member states. On 22 April 2020, the UK signed a bilateral Migration Action Plan with Greece, a key transit country for irregular migration and a long-standing partner to the UK [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-greece-migration-action-plan>].

The UK-Greece Action Plan aims to improve overall management of irregular migration in the Eastern Mediterranean. It focuses on tackling Organised Immigration Crime, improving asylum and returns processes in line with international law, and ensuring ongoing co-operation on search and rescue in the Aegean through the deployment of a UK vessel. The UK and Greece will establish a strategic dialogue to ensure ongoing engagement and close coordination under the Action Plan.

This agreement should be considered indicative of the active relationship, covering the range of operational, policy and programme issues identified by the Committee, the UK intends to maintain with European partners.

2. While the UK remained mostly insulated from large-scale arrivals to Europe in 2014–15, the human costs and political ramifications have been great. In the absence of robust and accessible legal routes for seeking asylum in the UK, those with a claim are left with little choice but to make dangerous journeys by land and sea. The UK has a strong economy and a proud history of helping those fleeing conflict and persecution, and should lead by example, creating more ambitious targets for resettlement. *We recommend that the Government expands the legal pathways to apply for asylum from outside Europe and works with EU partners to encourage them to do the same.* (Paragraph 8)

The range of legal pathways for immigration to the UK, and their efficient operation, is kept under review. The UK Government recognises the benefits the UK derives from immigration and the positive contribution skilled migrant workers make to our diverse society and dynamic economy. The UK Government will deliver a firmer, fairer, points-based system from January 2021 which will attract the brightest and best

from around the world to ensure that the UK has the skills and talents that it needs to support and grow our economy.

The FCO supports the delivery of the UK's asylum policy including by working closely with the UK's near neighbours to improve returns of those without legal right to remain in the UK. We will be watching closely the content of the draft New EU Pact on Asylum and Migration, due for publication before summer 2020, including for opportunities for the UK to act in mutual support through complementary policy approaches and activity—there is continued interest across the UK Government in working closely with the EU and its member states on issues of clandestine arrivals, secondary movement, and appropriate returns mechanisms.

The UK is one of the world's leading refugee resettlement states, resettling more refugees than any other country in Europe since 2015, more than 24,000 refugees have been given the chance to start a new life in the UK through refugee resettlement schemes. The UK Government announced its new global Resettlement Scheme in June 2019 through which it will continue to resettle vulnerable refugees in need of protection. The UK's refugee resettlement effort is part of the global response to humanitarian crises. Responding to refugee displacement is a shared challenge for the international community. The UK Government's record of refugee resettlement, combined with our overseas aid programmes, sends a strong signal of support to those countries hosting the most refugees.

As a result of COVID-19 border and travel restrictions, both in the UK and elsewhere, the vast majority of refugee resettlement activity has been paused. Refugee resettlement will re-commence as soon as conditions allow.

3. We are concerned by the evidence we received about the dire conditions for migrants in northern France, and by the reports of an increase in those taking dangerous routes to reach the UK, including by crossing the Channel in small boats. Focusing on increasing border security without improving conditions in the region may have the counterproductive effect of forcing migrants to make desperate journeys across the Channel. *We recommend that, in addition to its work to increase security in northern France, the UK should work closely with French authorities to improve the conditions for migrants. It should ensure efficient processing of asylum claims by those with relatives in the UK, and make it a priority to maintain close bilateral cooperation with France after Brexit, including on these claims.* (Paragraph 11)

The FCO agrees with the Committee's recommendation. The migration relationship with France—and other near neighbours such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain—is key to securing the UK's border and to an effective wider national immigration policy.

Our relationship with France continues to be governed by the Sandhurst Treaty (signed in January 2018), which makes provision for a “whole of route approach” to migration. Articles 2, 3 and 4 of this Treaty provide for co-operation on improving access to asylum services and improved implementation of the Dublin Regulation. The UK Government has committed a package of €50 million to implement our obligations under the Treaty, a portion of which has been allocated to activities under these Articles.

There has been a notable increase in small boat crossings since October 2018. Organised crime groups are taking advantage of vulnerable and desperate migrants, many of whom have undertaken long journeys to reach France. In response to this phenomenon, the UK and France agreed a Joint Action Plan in January 2019 (with an Addendum signed in September 2019), which outlined how our two countries would adapt policies, programmes and resources in response to this new threat. There is extensive operational liaison between relevant UK and French agencies, within the framework of strengthened political commitment, illustrated by frequent contact between the Home Secretary and France's Interior Minister.

Under the Joint Action Plan, the UK has invested an additional €3.6m across a range of programme interventions. Recognising, as the Committee notes, the value of preventing migrants reaching northern France, UK interventions are increasingly designed to move migrants away from the coastal region and, further back along the route, to prevent secondary movement towards France from elsewhere in the European mainland.

The risks of displacement along the near-European coast requires the UK also to improve its engagement in Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands. Resources are being invested here too as part of growing bilateral operational liaison.

While much of this increased engagement is led from the UK by the Home Office and its agencies, it also features a larger presence of UK officials on the ground and a significantly higher priority being accorded to this work by the political staff of British embassies in Paris, Madrid, Brussels and The Hague.

While the UK remains bound by the Dublin Regulation procedures for family reunification of asylum seekers, the UK remains ready to accept transfers whenever EU Member States are in a position to make those arrangements.

4. We are deeply concerned by the lack of search-and-rescue capacity in the Mediterranean. Under no circumstances should migrants be left to die as a deterrent to stop others arriving. The Minister's evidence did little to convince us that the FCO is seriously engaged with this problem. *We recommend that the UK Government works with European partners to take the necessary steps to ensure additional search-and-rescue capability, and in its response to the Committee it should set out how it will assess and determine this capacity, including targeting a reduction in attempts and a lowering of the fatality rate. This should include working closely with the new Italian government and offering UK capacity to support search-and-rescue efforts.* (Paragraph 14)

The FCO agrees with the Committee that Search and Rescue (SAR) needs to be an integral part of the response to irregular migration towards Europe. This is a frequently-changing policy and operational issue—as a result of COVID-19, the central Mediterranean has more recently become an even more challenging environment for SAR owing to the reduced number of safe or open ports for disembarkation.

The FCO will continue to argue for Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)-funded or -crewed vessels to be able to operate—it is important that this “humanitarian space” is protected—and for all SAR, including the discharge of obligations under Saving of Lives at Sea conventions, to be backed by predictable and voluntary relocation mechanisms. The UK maintains a dialogue on these matters with European partners, in Brussels and

in capitals. Engagement with Malta and Italy is prioritised.

Having deployed naval assets in the central Mediterranean from 2015 to 2018, and helped build the capacity of Libya's coastguard, the UK has more recently shifted its focus elsewhere—provision of equipment to Tunisia's coastguard, and a continuing maritime deployment in the Aegean in support of the Hellenic Coastguard. Since 2015, UK assets have saved over 35,000 lives.

The EU mission, Operation SOPHIA, which had a mandate to counter the threat from people smuggling and human trafficking, ceased its operations in March 2020. The EU has since agreed a new mission, Operation IRINI, with a different mandate—to enforce the UN arms embargo. It will have, as one of its secondary tasks, an ongoing training role with Libya's coastguard. Now outside of the EU, the UK played no role in developing the new operation's mandate, and the UK does not currently intend to contribute personnel or assets. However, the UK will be monitoring how the mandate is discharged, including that all deployed assets adhere to international obligations on Savings of Lives at Sea—Greece has offered its ports for disembarkation of those rescued—and that the mandate is not discharged in a manner that disproportionately negatively affects migrants. We will engage in Brussels and in capitals where necessary, in response to individual SAR incidents or emerging new trends.

SAR is only one part of HMG's "whole of route" approach to irregular migration. This includes working to prevent migrant boat launches by reducing the space in which organised immigration crime operates, improving the humanitarian situation of migrants in Libya, and building the capacity of authorities in countries "upstream" along the routes across the Sahel and from the Horn of Africa to improve their ability to respond to current and inevitable future irregular migration.

The UK and Africa

5. The EU's migration deals with Libya have achieved the short-term political "win" of cutting migrant numbers, but at the cost of fuelling human rights abuses, strengthening armed groups, and undermining stability in the longer term. There is compelling evidence of large-scale arbitrary detention, torture and sexual violence against migrants, and we are concerned by the evidence that UK funding could be contributing to these abuses. *We recommend that the UK should put in place robust monitoring and safeguards to ensure that its funding to migration programmes in Libya is not contributing to abuses, as well as to strengthen protection for migrants in Libya, and should press its European partners to do the same. Ensuring close dialogue on migration with European partners after Brexit will help the UK to make this case. In its response to this report, the Government should set out its assessment of how far human rights measures within its assistance to the Libyan Coastguard have improved this force's human rights performance, including actions taken, dates, and quantifiable measures.* (Paragraph 21)

The FCO does not support the Committee's characterisation of the EU's migration deals with Libya, nor their consequences. However, the FCO fully supports the need for a concerted humanitarian effort in Libya, and for all assistance to be assessed for risks that it is counter-productive. The Department for International Development has well-established and rigorous risk management processes to which all of its programmes are subject. Other UK Government programme interventions, delivered bilaterally or

through third parties, are subject to similar robust risk assessment.

The situation in Libya is complex. Competing interests are preventing the agreement of a ceasefire. Frustratingly-slow progress is being made through the Berlin Process. The UK is engaged across multiple agenda to promote de-escalation, a ceasefire and medium- and long-term solutions.

The FCO fully accepts the importance, in this situation, of giving attention to the plight of migrants caught up in the fighting, and the UK Government will continue to provide humanitarian assistance where we are confident it has effect. This includes DFID's £75m Safety, Support and Solutions II programme and the UK's continuing contributions to the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), both of which have dedicated Libya programmes. A separate DFID £3m programme supports the reintegration of returning migrants in Nigeria. The UK is also building capacity in Libya through a variety of interventions funded by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. We followed with interest the discussions between EU Foreign Ministers on 23 April 2020 and their decision to direct €35m from the EUTF to provide additional support to Libya's coastguard and to the International Organisation for Migration's efforts to build capacity to respond to the threat posed by COVID-19.

While these interventions are very important, lasting improvements to the situation of migrants in Libya will only come through political stability, improved security, improved economic prospects, and more effective provision of services. We see this support in-country as part of a broader "whole of route" approach that tackles the drivers of migration "upstream"—efforts elsewhere in Africa to promote safe, orderly and regular migration, and to highlight to prospective migrants the risks of journeys to Libya—and Search and Rescue (SAR) in the Mediterranean (as set out in our written evidence to the Committee's Inquiry) as noted above.

Also as noted above, the FCO sees SAR as an integral part of the response to irregular migration. This requires competent authorities with the assets and training to discharge their responsibilities.

Training of Libya's coastguard, either through a multilateral mechanism or provided by member states on a voluntary basis, as the UK did in 2017 via Operation SOPHIA, has focused on basic and advanced maritime skills, English-language training, and training on international humanitarian law and human rights within SAR and law enforcement contexts. All candidates for training were subject to a vetting process prior to acceptance on the courses.

Consistent with the wider approach to such capacity-building, the training programme was subject to a series of risk assessments, most recently in September 2019. The actions of Libya's coastguard were—and continue to be—closely monitored, including for potential human rights violations. Such incidents have been raised with the relevant authorities in Libya, and help to inform future training. On the whole, we assess Libya's coastguard's effectiveness to be improving, and we consider it to be playing an important role in challenging circumstances. As noted above, SAR is though only one part of the wider effort to address the plight of migrants in Libya.

6. Outsourcing Europe's migration work to fragile states carries the risk of counterproductive side effects. We support the principle of aiming to tackle the causes

of displacement “upstream”, in countries of origin and transit, but are concerned that the EU’s migration work in the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa risks exacerbating existing security problems, fuelling human rights abuses, and endorsing authoritarian regimes. Preventing local populations from crossing borders may help cut the numbers arriving in Europe in the short term, but in the long term it risks damaging economies and creating instability—which in itself can trigger displacement. Relying on partner governments to cut migration can prevent the UK pressing for other governance reforms, and there is evidence that it is used by partners as leverage to demand more assistance or other concessions. (Paragraph 27)

7. We were surprised at the lack of detail we were given when we questioned the FCO about the Government’s work with African partners. For example, the Minister did not appear to be aware of the existence of the Government’s “Africa Strategy”. The document itself is brief and lacking detail, as the Committee noted earlier this year, but the Minister’s lack of awareness of the Strategy does not fill us with confidence that the UK’s migration work with African partners is receiving substantial or considered input from the FCO. (Paragraph 28)

8. *We recommend that the Government should put in place robust monitoring processes to ensure that it is supporting successful operations to target the root causes of irregular migration, and is not contributing to conflict or instability through its migration work in Sub-Saharan Africa. The FCO should take the lead on ensuring that UK engagement on irregular migration with source and transit countries is viewed in terms of the full range of the UK’s strategic interests, and does not place undue emphasis on reducing arrivals to the exclusion of other goals, such as promoting stability and respect for fundamental human rights, and reducing poverty. In its response to this report, the FCO should provide a detailed assessment to the Committee on how efforts on irregular migration interact with other priorities in its approach to Sub-Saharan Africa.* (Paragraph 29)

The FCO recognises that safe, orderly and regular migration contributes to economic growth of both origin countries (eg through remittances) and hosting countries (eg through migrant labour). Reducing or cutting all forms of migration is therefore undesirable. The FCO welcomes the Committee’s support for “upstream” interventions and agrees with the Committee’s view that UK engagement on irregular migration should be viewed in terms of the full range of UK strategic interests. This includes, but is not limited to, UK immigration and clandestine entry attempts at the UK border.

Similarly, when considering the risk of displacement, it is important to tackle the demand for the services provided by Organised Immigration Crime in addition to its supply. Desperate migrants are vulnerable to exploitation by people smugglers and human traffickers willing to steer them towards higher risk methodologies.

Maintaining a broad balance of upstream interventions is therefore key—balance between migrant routes directly leading to the UK border, and those that lead elsewhere; between short- and long-term goals; between addressing irregular migration facilitators and the migrants themselves. We require a similar variety of interventions through our implementing partners, working with governments, regional organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations.

The UK Government's strategic approach to Sub-Saharan Africa, and its five pillars—Prosperity, Security and Stability, Climate Change, Demography and the Sahel—illustrates well how migration fits in this wider context. Not only does the UK aim to reduce the harms caused by irregular migration and strengthen partners' capacity to manage their borders and security, we also seek to encourage them to harness the benefits of safe, orderly and regular migration in the specific context of Sub-Saharan Africa—the region with the youngest and fastest growing population in the world.

UK interventions also seek to take a migrant-centred approach. In addition to promoting better border management, UK policies and programmes also address issues such as protecting victims of trafficking and smuggling, helping communities at risk of exploitation by organised immigration crime groups, and strengthening the legislative frameworks of partner countries to effectively administer justice.

More generally, the FCO uses bilateral relationships with states in Sub-Saharan Africa to encourage wider reforms and alleviate some of the pressures that contribute to people feeling compelled to migrate. We maintain that the UK cannot resolve the challenges of irregular migration alone and it is essential to involve partner governments in this effort in order to introduce long-lasting and effective change. The ultimate objective is to build the capacity of local authorities so that they can better manage irregular migration.

This requires us to see migration not through a narrow prism but through a broader lens including efforts such as fighting corruption, improving governance, building democracy and adhering to the rule of law, building confidence in democratic institutions, promoting and protecting human rights, and promoting a wide range of opportunities to allow potential migrants a choice between a local livelihood and an often-perilous journey.

9. *In its response to this report, the Government should set out when it decided to suspend migration cooperation with Sudan, and what tests will have to be met before it is restarted. If the Government resumes this cooperation, it should be done with caution and in close consultation with civil society groups both in Sudan and the UK.* (Paragraph 30)

Any measures to tackle irregular migration in Sudan and the Horn of Africa must address complex and interlinked issues. UK Government activity in this area has been delivered through migration programming of the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) to which the UK continues to contribute during the transitional period following its departure from the EU.

The vast majority of EUTF programming in Sudan focuses on humanitarian development assistance in areas such as healthcare and education. Two regional programmes operating in Sudan, the Better Migration Management Programme and the Regional Operations Centre Khartoum, improve migration governance, protection, and tackle trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants.

EU migration programming involving Sudanese law enforcement was paused in June 2019, due to the changed political and security situation following the fall of the previous regime and the use of violence against peaceful protestors. In October 2019, following the establishment of a civilian-led transitional government, the EU re-

established co-operation with the Sudanese authorities and resumed programming in Sudan. The UK has consistently sought for robust risk management in EU migration programming in Sudan, to ensure that EU programmes do not support unacceptable actions by the authorities.

Also in October 2019, the UK resumed working-level bilateral engagement on migration with the civilian-led transitional Sudanese government. However, there is currently no bilateral co-operation through programming. Any substantive cooperation or assistance will be subject to a rigorous risk assessment, including through the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) process.

10. We are concerned by evidence that climate change could cause greater levels of migration in the coming years. We recommend that the UK's work on migration in the Sahel, and more broadly, should address the wider, interlinked factors driving irregular migration—including climate change, conflict, repressive governance and corruption—rather than focusing narrowly on reducing the numbers reaching Europe's borders in the short term. We recommend that the FCO should place tackling climate change as a central part of its policy on irregular migration. (Paragraph 32)

The FCO welcomes the Committee highlighting the links between climate change and migration. We share the Committee's view that this policy area requires urgent consideration. While there is no current clear evidence that climate change drives irregular migration, it can amplify other—economic, social and political—drivers. We recognise that climate change will increasingly become a significant factor in driving migration and it is essential therefore that in the UK's "upstream" engagement, and as part of its global efforts, migration linked to climate change and environmental degradation is given due attention. We should expect the subject to feature at COP26.

The FCO, with DFID and Home Office, is currently undertaking an analysis of the available data and scoping potential policy responses. We expect these to build upon the UK's strong support to adaptation and mitigation, recognising the existential threat posed by climate change on some communities (eg in the Pacific). This is a large and challenging policy field—there is little international consensus yet on these policy issues despite the increasing urgency.

On the Sahel specifically, the FCO shares the Committee's view that the region requires a holistic response that addresses all the drivers of irregular migration. The Joint Sahel Department brings together the FCO, DFID and the Home Office to deliver a UK Government approach that seeks to ensure that the Sahel is better equipped to respond to conflict, is prepared to manage the effects of stresses and shocks including climate change, and is prevented from further degradation by tackling the drivers of poverty and insecurity. This joint approach will help to reduce the drivers of irregular migration and the harm that it causes.

The role of the FCO

11. It is an error to focus on preventing migration to the exclusion of other goals, such as preventing conflict and promoting stability and respect for fundamental human rights in source and transit regions. The UK's interests around irregular migration are broader than this, and include peace, stability and human rights in source and transit countries in

Africa and the Middle East, as well as the impact on our neighbours in Europe. *The FCO should ensure that the UK's broader strategic interests are fully taken into account in the formulation of migration policy—not just the domestic imperative to limit migration. As a start, this means ensuring that these factors play a significant role in the Illegal Migration Strategy, alongside that of limiting arrivals. Where key documents cannot be made public due to security concerns, such as this Strategy, it should be prepared to share these in confidence with the Committee to enable detailed scrutiny.* (Paragraph 34)

The FCO agrees with the Committee's broad view of the complexities of irregular migration and the UK's strategic interests in this field. The FCO promotes a holistic approach—understanding the wider context in which migration, both regular and irregular, takes place, and the interplay with broader interventions and priorities identified by the Committee in its report. A holistic approach is even more relevant in the face of the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the necessary global economic recovery. Safe, orderly and regular migration will play an essential part in this effort. Our support to the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees is a signal of the importance the FCO attaches to working with international partners, and of taking a global view, to address the wider context around migration.

As explained in the FCO's written evidence to the Committee's Inquiry, the current National Security Council Illegal Migration Strategy contains five pillars addressing asylum and returns, Europe's borders, upstream efforts, efforts to tackle organised immigration crime, and the global agenda. The Strategy's scope therefore ranges from the UK borders right back to drivers of migration in countries of origin, including conflict and instability. Interventions under the Strategy have included humanitarian and social integration assistance to migrants and refugees in Africa and the Middle East and capacity building of countries hosting large numbers of migrants and refugees, including European neighbours.

The Strategy is not however set in stone—for it to be effective it must adapt to the evolving challenges associated with both irregular and illegal migration and the opportunities of regular migration. The UK Government's efforts in this field, and the resources applied, therefore shift between the pillars. As the deaths of 39 Vietnamese nationals in Purfleet in October 2019 demonstrated, preventing clandestine entry at the UK's near border needs to feature prominently in this broader irregular migration effort.

12. Language matters, especially when discussing a highly sensitive issue such as migration. *We recommend that the Government should reassess its use of the term “illegal migration” in its strategy documents, and its categorisation of this issue primarily as a security threat rather than a question of stability. The human cost born by migrants should be front and centre of UK policy, and accompanied by the recognition that large-scale irregular migration can drain talent from countries that rely on their human capital to bring about changes at home. In its response to this report, the FCO should set out its reasons for the change in language used in its departmental plan, and its implications for policy. As a start, it should consider changing references from “illegal” to “irregular” migration throughout its policy documents.* (Paragraph 37)

As noted immediately above, the FCO is convinced that the UK's strategic interests need to drive the UK Government's efforts to respond to the challenges posed by

irregular and illegal migration, and harness the opportunities of regular migration. We welcome the Committee's support for this view.

The FCO also agrees with the Committee's views on the importance of using correct language in this complex policy field. The FCO assesses irregular and illegal migration to be distinct—although precise definitions are disputed amongst migration actors. The FCO seeks to apply the terms correctly, and will more often than not refer deliberately to the broader irregular migration rather than the narrower illegal migration. It is important though to recognise that interests and priorities vary across UK Government. It is appropriate for the FCO to acknowledge the priority attached by the Home Office to illegal migration in light of its responsibility for securing the UK border.

The policy document referred to by the Committee in its FCO oral evidence session captures the FCO's top-level foreign policy priority outcomes (FPPOs). In this document, the FCO's efforts on migration are set within the context of the FCO's wider objectives on serious organised crime and related issues. In this context, a reference to illegal migration is correct.

However, the FCO would encourage the Committee not to view this document, and this reference, as the sole focus of the FCO's migration effort. The FCO supports efforts to respond to the challenges posed by irregular migration, and the opportunities presented by regular migration, and it is goals in this broader and more ambitious agenda that drive FCO efforts and resources.