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I watched Keir Starmer talking on a news bulletin last night and heard him say, in words that echo those of Rishi Sunak, that we “have to stop the boats”.

He was, of course, referring to the inflatable craft being used by those seeking asylum in the UK to cross the English Channel when no other route is available to them before they can make an application to live in this country.

Starmer’s reasoning for this claim was that these boats are evidence that we have lost control of our borders. There was no hint of humanitarian concern. There was no suggestion in what was clipped as to how he would deal with the issue. There was no expression of interest in the broader issues that this crisis raises, whether for this country, for others, or for the future flows of migration that are inevitably going to increase as climate change becomes more severe. Instead, only the expression was that of a bureaucrat offended by action that upsets the routine that they desire, which is how it seems that he views this activity.

I am not naive. I am, of course, well aware that some of those who might cross the English Channel do so because they are being trafficked. However, in that case, they deserve protection from those abusing them.

I am equally aware that some of those who might be taking this perilous route do so simply because they are economically desperate, and not because they are at genuine risk in the countries from which they come. There is, in that case, obvious need for some mechanisms to sort those who are really refugees, from those who are seeking what is illegal entry.

However, what we do know is that a substantial majority of those who make this crossing do succeed with their asylum claim, despite the existence of a system which stacks the odds against them. In other words it would be wise to presume that those who have reached the English Channel have done so as a consequence of a state of genuine desperation. The willingness to go through the trauma of this process will, in a great many cases, be the clearest indication of that.

So, if Starmer is to provide an alternative, and this will no doubt become his

responsibility, what should he do?

Firstly, there should be an assumption that those claiming refugee status probably have it. I am not suggesting that this means that they be given an automatic right of entry into the UK. Both politically and practically that is not plausible or viable. There must, in that case, be a filtering process to determine which applications succeed, and which fail. That necessary process must, however, be undertaken humanely, with a degree of sympathy for the likely refugees plight, and with the assistance provided so that those with a proper case can be identified, assisting in the process the identification of those acting inappropriately.

Secondly, as so many with expertise in this area have suggested, this process could take place in France. At the very least, initial vetting should be possible there, with mutual cooperation between the UK and France to make this possible. I am aware of all the inconvenience to France that those seeking entry to the UK creates, but given that they have no choice but face this issue, redirecting funds away from creating criminality towards assistance, speedy decision making, and facilitation of rapid transit if that is the right outcome, would be in everyone's best interests. It might also cost considerably less than current attempts to address this problem.

Thirdly, and most obviously, this then provide the opportunity to stop the boats. Those able to cross the Channel could then do so using safe routes , like ferries, with tickets provided, and buses to ensure their appropriate onward transport.

Fourthly, if despite this, there were then to still be small boat traffic the likelihood that it would involve those with a limited chance of a right entry is high. In that case a changed approach towards policing of that activity could take place on both sides of the Channel, whilst still requiring a continued open-mind on the need to protect those who might be trafficked.

I am not sure why it is so hard for Keir Starmer to explain such a potential policy. At the heart of any solution to this problem there has to be a method that differentiating those who are likely to have a legitimate claim of entry to the UK under international law from those who have not got that right. Until that happens, the prospect of successfully persuading France, or any other country, to treat what is happening as an illegal activity is low, which is why I understand their reluctance to overly deter this traffic. They know that legitimate refugees are those most commonly to be found amongst those on the beaches of Northern France. Do they have to stop them in that case? Until that changes - which it is only in our power to do - why should they?

Only when those in small boats are those most likely to not have a good claim for entry into the UK can successful action against this traffic begin. I would have thought Keir Starmer would understand that. I would have hoped that he would want to. I would equally hope that he will want to make sure that we act humanely and with sympathy to those in a desperate situation. But perhaps I am naive, after all, in believing that this

is what he might think.