

Dear council members,

as a son of a Holocaust survivor - a Jewish refugee, as an international refugee law academic, and as a resident of Oxfordshire, I support Cllr Gant's refugee protection motion.

'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries freedom from persecution', says Article 14 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. But how CAN you get safely and legally to other countries? Well, if you are British, your passport gives you visa-free access on arrival to 132 countries, and nearly all other countries will grant you a visa on application. The same is not true if you are Iraqi, Iranian, or Syrian.

Indeed virtually all persons applying for asylum in the UK had to enter it irregularly – smuggled in lorries, crossing the channel in small boats, or using forged documentation to obtain visas. Ask yourself: why would a young Eritrean fearing indefinite military service under conditions of servitude in the world's second-most unfree country after North Korea pay thousands of pounds to malevolent traffickers, risking their lives by travelling in unseaworthy boats to come from Calais to the UK, rather than board a Eurostar for £50? The answer is clear: if they attempted to use their national documents, they will be denied a visa and boarding. They literally have no safe and legal routes to get here. Indeed, except for the special schemes for Ukrainians and for Hong Kong, no one does.

The illegal migration Act amounts to an asylum ban; it extinguishes the right to seek protection in the UK for those who arrive irregularly no matter how genuine and compelling their claim may be, and with no consideration of their individual circumstances. Egregiously, it disqualifies even modern slavery victims, which the former PM May's legislation sought to protect.

Denying access to asylum on this basis undermines the very purpose for which the Refugee Convention was established and indeed manifestly breaches it – as UNHCR clearly stated after its passage. The Act will inevitably leave asylum-seekers with inadmissible claims in limbo, waiting for the government to negotiate 'return' agreements with countries they have never been to, to which they have no connections, and which may not offer them protection.

The motion rightly calls the council to sign the national 'Fight the Anti-Refugee Laws' pledge, urges the government to repeal the *illegal* illegal migration Act and, most critically, to lobby against central Government plans to build or repurpose facilities in Oxfordshire to detain or warehouse seekers of sanctuary.

Please support it this afternoon.